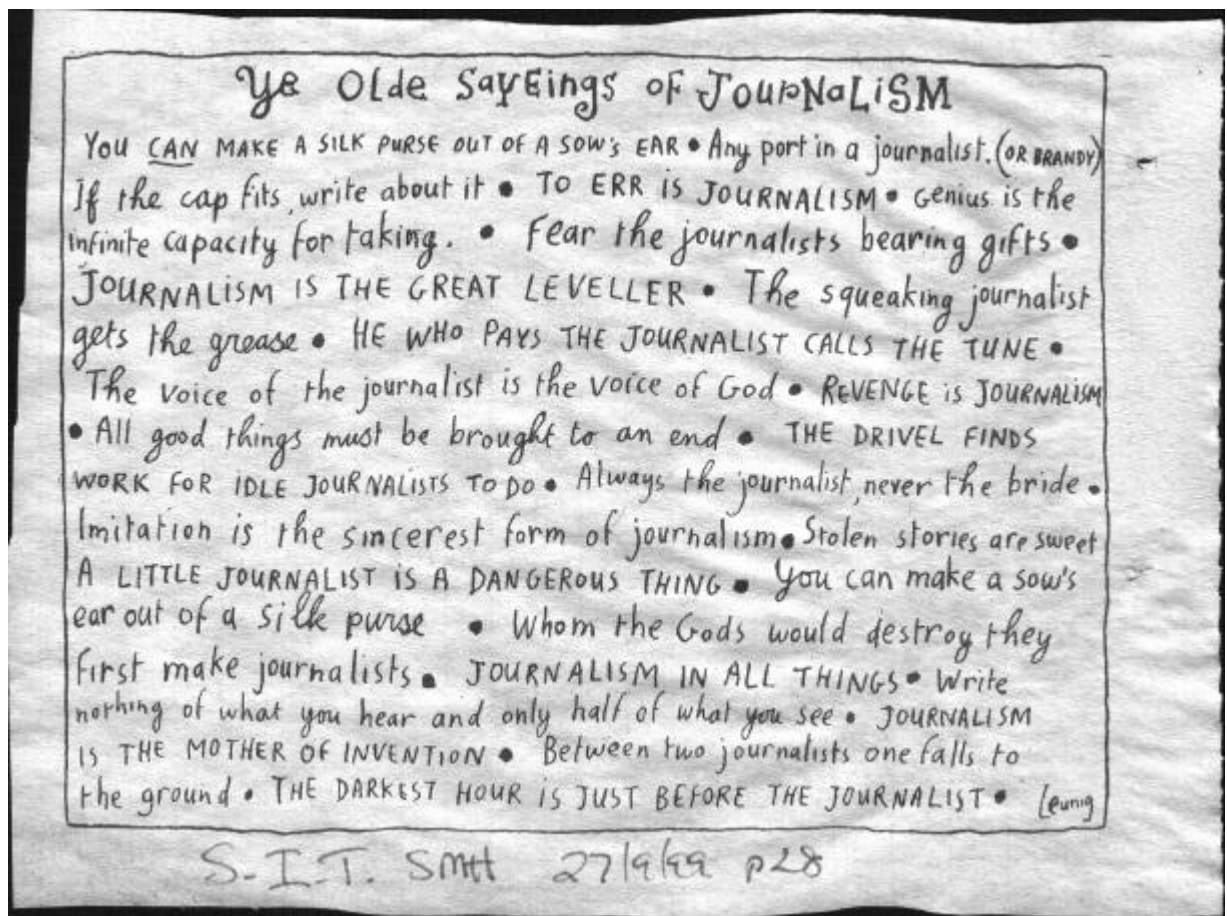


Grey Collar Journalism:

The social relations
of news production

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Grey Collar Journalism: The social relations of news production

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Table of Contents

	Contents	i
	Acknowledgments	ii
	Abstract	iii
	Preface	v
Chapter 1	Why I Write: The Journalist as modern ‘Intellectual’	1
Chapter 2	Raymond Williams - On Culture and Economy	42
Chapter 3	Hard Yakka: Towards a labour theory of journalism	67
Chapter 4	The emotional ties that bind: Grey Collar Journalists and the Nation-State	118
Chapter 5	Class and the politics of journalism	175
Chapter 6	Where were you on November 11? Generational change in the media ranks	219
Chapter 7	Profitability and Public Interest: Can we revive the Fourth Estate?	261
Chapter 8	Killing me softly with his words: Doing violence to the truth	295
Chapter 9	Grey collar intellectuals: Thinking writers, or cogs in a machine?	333
	References	345

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Grey Collar Journalism: A *strange and terrible saga*

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Abstract

Grey Collar Journalism

The social relations of news production

On any meaningful notion of 'class' as a concept related to the social relations deriving from the system of production in a Capitalist society like ours, journalists are not 'middle class'...they are not particularly well paid, their union and their industrial actions are, for all intents and purposes, the same as any other group of unionists.

Keith Windschuttle 1998, p.351

The purpose of my Doctoral thesis - *Grey Collar Journalism: The social relations of news production* - is to analyse the role of journalists as public intellectuals (Louw 2001) and to do so from an understanding of newswork as a labour process. Along the way I have developed a critical appraisal of various theoretical approaches to the study of journalism. Broadly speaking this thesis is in the discipline of the sociology of journalism, but it is without question a cross-disciplinary thesis and necessarily so.

In the first three chapters I develop and explain what I mean by *Grey Collar Journalism* and the 'journalist-as-intellectual'. This section of the thesis articulates what I call the 'labour theory of journalism' to further explain the ambivalent nature (Hallin 1994; Franklin 1997) of modern journalism. I argue here that this ambivalence in modern journalism is reflected in the contradictory relationship between grey collar newswriters and the Nation-State. This is expressed through what I have called the 'emotional dialectic' of newswork and the 'dialectic of the front-page'.

It is this *labour theory of journalism* that brings forth the concept of the grey collar journalists, which I define as a cohort of newswriters who occupy a contradictory class location - broadly speaking the 'new middle class' to which

the category of 'newsworker' belongs (Callinicos 1989b). Grey collar journalists are also public intellectuals in the Gramscian sense of being the producers and circulators of various ideas in civil society - snippets of ideology and social science- in the service of either of the major contending classes: Labour and Capital.

The labour theory of journalism is then employed in a study of Australian political journalism to identify the social forces that create the conditions in which grey collar journalists operate. These are defined and analysed as the economic, class, cultural, political, historical and social relations of production that underpin the contradictory and ambivalent "emotional attitudes" (Orwell 1988, p.9) of newsworkers.

In the next few chapters, Australian examples are illustrated in order to critically examine the highly politicised and culturally-mystified relationship between journalism as a set of social practices and the important centres of power in a monopoly capitalist society - in principal the ruling class and the state apparatus. This development of the grey collar thesis grounds a class-based critique of the liberal-democratic theory of the media as 'Fourth Estate'. In particular, I critically discuss changes to the MEAA Code of Ethics that were accepted in 1998, after lengthy debate in the union's ranks and in the media.

The final chapters of the thesis test the explanatory power of the grey collar thesis against recent attempts to theorise journalism from a cultural studies perspective and the so-called 'media wars' debates of the late 1990s. In particular I challenge John Hartley's assertion that we are now in the age of postmodern journalism.

Preface

Changing journalism in a changing world

Unlike a cake of soap or a bar of chocolate, a motor-car or a radiator, all coming off the production line 99.9 per cent identical, the daily newspaper changes from edition to edition and even more drastically from day to day. (Rivett, 1965, p.23)

We could add to Rivett's accurate, but seemingly unremarkable¹ observation: newspapers change even more from decade to decade. It's fair to say that newspapers have changed more in the last ten years than they did in the 65 years from 1901 to 1965. Apart from advances in printing technology and colour photography, the newspaper business was fairly stable for the first half of the 20th Century. Now mergers, closures, lay-offs and new marketing strategies are rapidly altering the media landscape. The technology of broadcasting has advanced at a similar pace and changes in the electronic media are also quicker today than in the 1960s. In particular, converging and interactive technologies have revolutionised patterns of both media production and media consumption.

The computer-driven globalization of information is having profound effects on what we fondly called the News Business. Anyone with a PC can launch an unedited piece of gossip that may seep into the bloodstream of news. (Schorr, 1999)

¹ The 'thesis' of this thesis is that in fact news production is remarkably similar to the production lines Rivett is describing in this passage. See Chapter 3: *Hard Yakka*.

Changing journalism

Essentially, this thesis answers the question: Can changes in what I call here the *emotional attitudes* of journalists and the *dialectic of the front-page* - that is the ideological content of news - be measured and plotted against changes in how the *news commodity* is produced?

Put simply, I believe the answer lies in an understanding of the relations of production - the ways in which the work of journalists is organised, structured and controlled in the newsroom.

The changes that have been wrought on the media business; declining circulations, competition from pay TV and the Internet creating a situation of uncertain profitability, greater numbers of women in the newsroom and more powerful computing technologies have had a significant impact on newswriters. This thesis examines how the style of journalism has changed, as a result of the shifting relations of production in the news business.

Journalists as Intellectuals

To what social class do newswriters belong? The hegemonic ideology of 'professionalism' in the media's ranks would suggest that they are part of the 'middle class', perhaps some well-paid hacks are close to being members of the 'elite'. The grey collar thesis is that the majority of journalists are workers, but the dual nature of the news 'product' allocates them to contradictory class locations with resulting ambivalence in their consciousness. There is in fact an emotional dialectic at play that drags newswriters in the direction of one or the other of the major social classes. They vacillate and sometimes change sides, but they also reflect and expose, to the careful reader, listener or viewer, the unsolvable contradictions within the system as a whole; whether economic, legal, social, cultural or political. Antonio Gramsci clearly identifies journalists as intellectuals and the media as "organisations of intellectual dissemination" (Gramsci 1992b, p.208).

Following the logic of Marx and Gramsci, this thesis argues that journalists are public intellectuals: that is they articulate and produce ideas that inform the public. It is this clash between the informational, commercial and emotional functions of the news that creates contradictions in the emotional attitudes of

journalists. The role of the news is to disseminate important information (though sometimes it seems extremely trivial) and they explain the world to a reading, listening and viewing audience. In the modern world this is an important function. The public sphere is the media circulating across the terrain of the nation (Mercer 1992). As public intellectuals, journalists are the producers and popularisers of ideologies - both dominant and oppositional. The grey collar thesis is an attempt to explain why, when and how these contradictory dialectics of the front-page express themselves.

A way forward?

At the beginning of the 21st Century journalism is changing - it probably always will be. The questions are really: How? and Why?

The 'how' is theorised in this thesis as the trend for journalism to become cross generic, that is to blur the boundaries between facticity and less informational forms of entertainment. This is evident in the growing phenomenon of 'infotainment' as a genre in its own right.

The cross-generic nature of contemporary journalism is a manifestation of the emotional dialectic of our epoch: in this case the dialectic of what Frederic Jameson (1991) has described as the cultural logic of late capitalism, or the 'condition' of postmodernity. As outlined in chapter one I believe that the most useful interpretation of the postmodern condition is as a transitional stage in which new cultural forms are emergent. Though, as my discussion of Raymond Williams in chapter 2 suggests, emergent dialectics can be subsumed into the dominant ideological paradigm. This is, I feel, the fate of what John Hartley calls 'postmodern journalism' (Hartley 1996). The question of whether or not Jameson's 'cultural logic' has decisively shifted the epoch from the 'modern' to the 'postmodern' has not yet been answered.

The 'why' question is more problematic, but I have outlined the beginnings of an answer in this thesis. Grey collar newswriters demonstrate competing and conflicting emotional attitudes across the genres of journalism precisely because the nature and organisation of their work - the social relations of news production - are also shifting in response to new technologies, new ways of consuming news 'information' and a contested ideological framework. The transition period - as

identified by Jameson (1998) is not yet over - the emotional dialectic of modernity has not yet been fully synthesised by postmodernity. There is, as Catharine Lumby points out, an “unpleasant noise”, a “necessary grinding of gears in our knowledge and culture industries”, which “heralds a shift [in] the future of both academic media studies and professional practice” (Lumby 1999, p.39).

The following chapters suggest that the tools and data to answer the ‘why’ question can be accessed through the application of the labour theory of journalism. That is, in the dialectical relationship between ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’ and through a careful study of the social relations of news production.

Chapter 1

Why I Write: The journalist as modern 'intellectual'

My starting point is always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice. When I sit down to write...it [is] because there is some lie I want to expose, some facts to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing. But I could not do the work of writing a book, or even a long magazine article, if it were not also an aesthetic experience...The job is to reconcile my ingrained likes and dislikes with the essentially public, non-individual activities that this age forces on all of us. (Orwell 1984a, pp.11-12)

Grey collar journalism: An 'emotional attitude' to modernity?

George Orwell/Eric Blair will always remain one of the quintessential grey collar journalists. He was a committed socialist, gave his time to causes he believed in and was proud of his own political bias in the pursuit of truthful reporting and better writing:

And the more one is conscious of one's political bias, the more chance one has of acting politically without sacrificing one's aesthetic and intellectual integrity. (Orwell 1984a, .11)

Orwell was a public intellectual in every sense of the word. He thought deeply and intelligently about the issues of his time. He used reason, insight and reportage to question his world while always maintaining his aesthetic and intellectual integrity. That he maintained an optimistic faith in the strength of working class ideas and organisational ability is admirable in any human being.

That he did so at a time when the major British and international left organisations were befuddled by the twists and turns of Stalinist orthodoxy (Birchall 1974) is more than remarkable. At this time, in the late 1940s while Orwell battled ill health to finish *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-four*, the world's proletariat was in dire straits indeed.

I admire Orwell because his emotional attitude was clearly and without waver, that of an intelligent left-wing intellectual *journalist* in the middle years of the 20th century - a difficult time for socialists. Today very few journalists display these attributes. John Reed Studs Terkel and Mike Moore are three standout American figures in this mould. John Pilger is the best known Australian left-wing journalist and Paul Foot² is a prominent English socialist working for a London tabloid. Left-wing intellectuals are few and far between in the media's ranks.

Orwell: Organic journalist and writer

George Orwell is an ideal example of what the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci recognised as an 'organic intellectual' of the working class. Orwell is clearly a socialist throughout his life: his writing and journalism contain a deep-running commitment to left-wing politics and the humanism of real socialism. As John Newsinger (1999) points out, Orwell was active in politics and in wider networks of left-wing intellectuals of the period. In a sense Orwell and Gramsci were contemporaries, though when Gramsci died in the autumn of 1935, Orwell was planning to go on the road to Wigan pier (Shelden 1982, p.238).

The following section outlines Gramsci's position on the role of the intellectual to contextualise further discussion of Orwell and the social conditions that create the grey collar journalist.

Antonio Gramsci and the grey collar intellectual

Pessimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will.

² John Pilger is well known in Australia for his journalism, books and documentaries. Paul Foot is an English socialist who also writes a weekly page for the London tabloid *Daily Mirror*. He is also a contributor to *Socialist Worker* and the *London Review of Books*. His best journalism is collected in *Words as Weapons: Selected Writing 1980-1990* (Foot 1990).

(L'Ordine Nuovo masthead)

This slogan was the masthead of a left-wing newspaper co-founded by Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci (Buttegieg 1992, p.12). During his long stint in jail for anti-fascist political activity, Gramsci wrote in small notebooks. Sometime in the early 1930s he penned this in his 9th book, under the sober heading “Optimism, pessimism”:

The only justifiable enthusiasm is that which accompanies the intelligent will, intelligent activity, the inventive richness of concrete initiatives which change existing reality. (Gramsci nd cited in Buttegieg 1975a, p.12)

Gramsci himself remained optimistic most of his time in prison even when his health was clearly failing from the middle of 1933. His friends and supporters campaigned tirelessly for his release on compassionate grounds. After a long delay and seriously ill, Gramsci was moved to a hospital and left under light guard. He was never actually free despite a conditional discharge from the Italian courts in October 1934. Antonio Gramsci died in the Quisisana clinic in Rome on 27 April 1936 (Fiori 1970, pp.282-289).

In prison Gramsci had read whatever was at hand and made notes. He also wrote coded political messages to his friends and to other political prisoners (Buttegieg 1992, p.13). After being moved to a prison hospital late in 1934 Gramsci continued some study. He used what little time and energy he still had to systematise the smuggled notebooks and add revised insights (Fiori 1970).

Gramsci was systematic and he studied the question of intellectuals in civil and political institutions. He noted a clear historical and political role for intellectuals; his interest sparked by the very real presence of openly pro-fascist intellectuals who championed Mussolini. Of course Gramsci himself was a formidable intellect and political fighter. In his fourth notebook Gramsci writes that every class that comes into being as a result of controlling all property and economic relations creates, “together with itself, organically a rank or several ranks of intellectuals” (Gramsci 1992b, p.199). For Gramsci the intellectual always had a relationship with centres of power in civil society and the State (Holub 1992, p.23).

What Gramsci meant by the intellectuals were those writers, economists, high public servants, lawyers, academics, journalists and political organisers whose popular work, either on the street, or in print, “represents moral and ideological positions in the cultural sphere” (Holub 1992, p.24). Those with the organisational skills to run industry for Capital Gramsci called the “scientists of political economy”. His notes describe other ruling class intellectuals, or those *organically linked to the functions of Capital*, as an organisational wing and protector of the “investors in his business, of the buyers of his products, etc.” (Gramsci 1992b, p.199).

According to Gramsci, the relationship between intellectuals and the system of production is not always “direct”; rather it is “mediated” by the institutions and customs of civil society while at the same time, regulated by the various arms of the state apparatus. Like Karl Marx, Gramsci believed fundamentally that the dominant group of intellectuals will be those who best represent “social hegemony” and ultimately “domination of the state”. In his estimation, the “urban type” of intellectual is “closely tied to industry” and is “increasingly mistaken for the real, *organic* general staff of the upper industrial class” (Gramsci 1992b, pp.200-201).

Gramsci clearly indicates that national social formations will produce their own organic set of intellectuals, thus there are differences between European, British, American and other national groups of intellectuals allied to their own national bourgeoisie. Moreover, he notes the importance of combined and uneven development among intellectuals; even those allied to the emerging ruling class. In England for example the organic intellectuals of the British capitalist class, “came into existence on the basis of modern industrialism,” though he notes an important instance of the dialectic of history (combined and uneven development). The “old class of landowners” maintained their intellectual and political leadership in the development of a cohesive class ideology³:

In other words: the old landed class is joined to the industrialists by

³ I’m sure that some members of the current Bush administration would dearly love to overthrow the Enlightenment project and appear to cling to Empire.

a kind of suture similar to the one by which in other countries the dominant classes are joined to the traditional intellectuals (Gramsci 1992b, p.205).

Gramsci is also interested in “another interesting symptom in America...a surprising number of black intellectuals” (Gramsci 1992b, p.206). Gramsci also clearly links organic intellectuals to the working class, thus providing a theoretical model for the conceptualisation of a grey collar journalist and the emotional dialectic within journalism. It arises from Gramsci’s clear distinction between “traditional” and “organic” intellectuals (Gramsci 1992b, pp.202). The traditionalists are those whom capitalism inherited from previous social formations (notably the remnants of the feudal church, or Islam; constitutional law; criminal law [with obvious property modifications]) and those whom grow organically on the basis on new social relations of production. The most obvious ‘organic’ intellectual formation of monopoly capitalism is economic rationalism (a whole new range of bourgeois social sciences and further codification of international economic regimes). It was clear to Gramsci that the ruling class had developed a cadre of organic intellectuals under the conditions of capitalism: they created, revised and popularised bourgeois ideology. Thus the ideas of the bourgeoisie become hegemonic.

For Gramsci the socialist, the question became: Can the working class develop its own organic intellectuals? Obviously it could, indeed it had done so many times: Marx, Engels and the European tradition to Lenin and Trotsky. Socialist movements existed in most nations and were still loosely linked in the Communist International. Books, pamphlets, newspapers and articles were mass-produced in most languages of the world. Gramsci indicated how these intellectual forces came into being.

In the careful language he was forced to adopt in the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci hints at the formation of proletarian class-consciousness among a section of the urban group of intellectuals:

Factory technicians do not exercise any political influence on the instrumental masses, or at least that phase has already been superseded. Sometimes precisely the reverse takes place: the

instrumental masses—at least, through their own organic intellectuals—exercise an influence over the technicians. (Gramsci 1992b, p.202).

Continuing in this oblique way Gramsci concludes that the intellectual, whether of that class by birth, or by reason of political allegiance, is bound to a class by the political party. In his direct experience this applied both the Italian left and to Mussolini's fascists:

An intellectual who joins the political party of a particular social group blends with the organic intellectuals of that same group and binds himself closely to that group. (Gramsci 1992b, p.202)

There is no doubt that throughout his life George Orwell was engaged with the great questions of his epoch in a way that reached millions over many years. He came to a political consciousness slowly at first, but it never left him. He also intuitively understood Gramsci's position on optimism and pessimism. Orwell's political biographer John Newsinger, suggests that in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell delivers "a telling catalogue of misery and oppression", at the same time, in his diary Orwell notes the optimistic spirit of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement (Newsinger 1999, pp.36-37).

In a newspaper column entitled 'Why I Write' and first published in 1946, Orwell says that before they "ever begin to write", most writers will develop a world-view, an outlook on life, "from which he [sic] will never completely escape" (1984a, p.9). Orwell calls this an "emotional attitude" that the writer will "discipline" in order not to get stuck "at some immature stage". However, he warns that if a writer "escapes from his [sic] early influences altogether, he will have killed his impulse to write" (Orwell 1984a, p.9). Orwell's argument here is of key importance to the grey collar thesis. Quite clearly Orwell is suggesting that a writer's emotional attitude – their *outlook on life*, their *world-view* – is clearly political and shaped by the social forces at play in the world around. Orwell was well acquainted with Marxist theory of the major class divisions within capitalism and painfully aware of his own petty-bourgeois background. In terms of the grey collar thesis it is important to establish the class content of journalistic ideologies and practices and equally important to indicate how

various class-based emotional attitudes exist along an axis: the emotional dialectic. It is also necessary to establish briefly that journalists can be a category of intellectuals.

Economic and ideological arguments about the class location of mental and manual labour are taken up in chapter 3. At this point it is sufficient to mention the discussion of journalist-as-intellectual in Australia. Pat Buckridge argues that there are several models for intellectual journalism and she provides case studies for three: Brian Penton, J.D. Pringle and Paul Kelly. Her starting point is that the role of public intellectual “may involve a significant degree of social and cultural expression”. The mass media is an arena for the “social circulation of ideas”, she adds there is also a public *image* of the journalist as intellectual. She notes how hard it was to establish this tradition in the 1930s because of the strong larrikin, anti-intellectualism of many Australian newswriters and editors (Buckridge 1999, pp.185-186). Each of the editors discussed has had to compromise, balance competing interests and strategise to maintain their positions of influence and each was a product of their time.

From Buckridge’s brief descriptions it is possible to argue that Penton and Pringle were very much *traditionalists* in terms of newspaper intellectuals. Penton was an old-style Australian nationalist and anti-authoritarian. Buckridge suggests he used his influence as a “carefully controlled instrument of political persuasion...calculated to promote a certain style of liberalism” (1998, p.198). Buckridge describes Penton’s style as “organic/charismatic”:

The first element denotes a certain type of relationship with the society the intellectual addresses: a close, almost inseparable bonding (often evoked in metaphors of organic connection). The second element denotes the characteristic effectivities of the address: emotive, non-rational, prophetic. (Buckridge 1999, p.191)

Near the end of World War II Penton wrote *Advance Australia – Where?* which contains a line suggesting there was in 1943 a “painful cleavage at the very base of the contemporary mind” (cited in Buckridge 1999, p.191). Buckridge rightly contends that this contradiction was the inevitable result of clashing social forces beyond Penton’s control, but that he was fully aware of:

Resulting from the violent contradictions to which traditional liberal-democratic beliefs had been subjected by monopoly capitalism, scientific scepticism and psychoanalysis...but again, it is Penton himself whose own split consciousness stands as the implicit paradigm of this condition. (Buckridge 1999, p.191)

Brian Penton, the traditional intellectual of an earlier period in journalism, suffered a fractured consciousness; clearly the result of dialectics and his understanding of contending social forces. Ultimately Penton recognised the importance of his relationship with the proprietor, Frank Packer and to anticipate his editorial thinking. Buckridge says Penton regarded it as a complementary partnership and that it was “crucial to the effectiveness of his intellectual project as editor” (1998, p.193). Buckridge also comments on the technical and bureaucratic elements of intellectual journalism, specifically in relation to editors: these issues are taken up in several later chapters.

J. D. Pringle was a later generation and an English journalist in the literary tradition and possessed an articulated intellectual framework, again assuming the traditional liberal posture of independent editor who wished to make the paper in his image. He was far more radical than his employer Warwick Fairfax was. Fairfax reprimanded Pringle in 1969 for being less than respectful to the Monarchy and too loose in regard to sexual mores. Buckridge notes that when Pringle finally left the Sydney Morning Herald, “one might have expected a more jaundiced view of press proprietors,” instead he adopted a more *realistic* attitude:

In fact, while acknowledging the occasional awkwardness in the relations between proprietors and editors he believed there was no realistic alternative for newspaper ownership and control in a capitalist society. (Buckridge 1999, p.197)

Here again we see a stark illustration of the limits imposed by social forces beyond the editor’s control and a recognition of the basic contradiction in journalistic consciousness: ideals clash with the reality of capitalist relations in production and in the civil society. Penton and Pringle are examples of intellectuals compromised by their support for capitalism. The fact that they even

acknowledge this fact and the pressure it places them under is evidence of shifting emotional dialectics among journalist-intellectuals. This is an important early indicator of the grey collar thesis; sociological and political economic methods will be brought to bear in subsequent chapters to further illustrate these points.

If Brian Penton and J. D. Pringle were products of their time, what about Paul Kelly of *The Australian*? That he is an intellectual is not in doubt, he is a well-credentialed author and distinguished editor. According to Buckridge he is not comfortable describing himself as an intellectual, though he does profess strong views and frequently has the editorial space to do so. Kelly's intellectual profile fits that of an organic bourgeois intellectual-journalist. He began his career in 1971 and is of a much later generation than Penton or Pringle. Kelly's political stance can be described as economic liberalism and strong support for Australia's national interest as identified by the government of the day. Krause identifies this as an intellectual ranged along the "continuum from truth to power" (1971, p.277) and Buckridge notes his views tended to be "generally in line with the Keating government's key policy directions":

But for Kelly the values that bin his views on various issues together are individual freedom and national prosperity, particularly the latter...at the end of the day as ways of profiling Australia most attractively to the Asian market. (Buckridge 1999, p.201)

The role of the 'national interest' ideology in forming the emotional attitudes of contemporary journalism are taken up in later chapters; specifically chapter 4. Kelly's editorial framework is, according to Buckridge, agreed in advance with Rupert Murdoch and calculated to support policies that are deemed to be good for business. Like Penton and Pringle, Paul Kelly moves very close to the top circles in Australian business and politics. His opinions are influential in shaping media coverage of major stories and in shaping public attitudes. Kelly appeals to the educated middle classes and articulates an ideology on behalf of this group. This reflects the contradictory class locations in which the grey collar journalist operates; these issues are pursued in chapter 4. The following section continues to outline the concept of emotional attitude.

What is Emotional Attitude today?

All newswriters both consciously or unconsciously, will hold and display an emotional attitude towards the subject 'news'. This may range from an uneasy feeling about some ethical dilemma they might face, to some understanding of the place of journalism in the world and, in the best cases, the ability to question and be reflexive about all the social relations that weave around and through journalism. As the product of 'our' time, reflection on the emotional attitudes of journalism today centres around ethics: the 'right' way to gather news; accuracy and objectivity; notions of bias versus public service and the impact of 'infotainment' genres on 'serious' news values⁴.

These elements and others are the issues journalists discuss today, or as Orwell puts it they form an "emotional attitude" (1984a, p.9) common to certain cohorts of journalists and other newswriters at the end of the 20th Century and the first years of the 21st. As we shall see in sections of this thesis, these are the issues that are really 'on-the-table' following the 1998 'Media Wars'⁵.

An emotional dialectic of the front-page?

Emotion: an affective state of consciousness

Dialectic: a process of change that results from an interplay between opposite tendencies. Macquarie Dictionary

In concluding his essay 'Marxism and Postmodernism', Jameson (1998c) returns to two of my favourite themes - "proletarianization on a global scale"⁶, and "something mysteriously called 'cognitive mapping' of a new and global type". Then the *piece de resistance*:

But 'cognitive mapping' was in reality nothing but a code word for 'class consciousness' of a new and hitherto undreamed of kind...
(Jameson 1998c, p.49)

⁴ These issues are discussed in chapter 7, *Profitability & the Public Interest*.

⁵ 'Media Wars' was the title of a cultural studies and journalism conference in Brisbane at the end of 1998. The issues raised there are a central concern of this thesis and dealt with substantially in chapter 8, *Killing me softly with his words*.

⁶ See chapter 3, *Hard Yakka*.

Jameson's 'cognitive mapping' is Orwell's 'emotional attitude', it is Raymond Williams 'lived experience' (1980b), it is 'class consciousness'. This is useful for this thesis because the concept of grey collar journalism encompasses a range of emotional attitudes - ideologies and political positions that are contradictory and for some newswriters, confused or confusing.

The emotional attitudes of an age are created in a dialectic, the interplay of opposing social forces, what I have come to call the 'emotional dialectic'. In short, it is a product of the balance of class forces at any given historical juncture. It is a function of their economic location within the capitalist production process, their political and their ideological conditioning. However, it is the economic that finally determines this consciousness, in the final instance. This is the process that determines a person's view of the world and forms their consciousness. In the case of newswriters, occupying a contradictory class location, the principal economic determinant is their 'in between' status. They are not owners of the means of production, but wage-labourers who perform *some* ideological and political control functions of Capital (Poulantzas 1975, p.209). In news media, the 'interplay' of opposing forces - the emotional dialectic - carries over into the news agenda and decisions about how and why a story should be reported. It might even have a direct impact on where the news item is published. I call this the 'dialectic of the front-page'.

I am writing this thesis to answer a basic question:

To what extent are economic relations determining of a newswriter's "emotional attitude" - their class consciousness - formed by the economic, technological, political and cultural organisation of the news gathering and writing process - the social relations of news production - both inside and outside the newsroom?

Or put another way: *do economic forces and relationships ultimately determine the emotional dialectic?*

My short answer, further examined in the next chapter, is that the economic is determinant of the emotional dialectic. This is even more apparent in the dialectic of the front page because of the presence of advertising - the very

dimensions of the news 'hole' are ultimately determined by the amount of space previously sold to advertisers.

Modern Times & "Media Wars"

George Orwell, the grey collar intellectual, like all of us, was a product of his times - by this I do not mean a fatalistic surrendering of will or agency to some outside social force (let alone a 'higher power'). The individual lives in a dialectical relationship with the real, social world. We are not *tabula rasa*, but conscious beings with the ability to reason, desire, love and hate. I think, if I paraphrase a distant memory, that Marx might have said words to the effect that *people make their own history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing*. Certainly this is a sentiment that George Orwell might well have found himself in agreement with, for he says of writers that:

...subject-matter will be determined by the age he [sic] lives in - at least this is true in tumultuous, revolutionary ages like our own - but before he begins to write he will have acquired an emotional attitude from which he will never really escape. (Orwell 1984, p.9)

What is our age? This is a centrally important theme throughout this work. It cannot be otherwise. Orwell was without doubt a product of late modernity. Before he died prematurely, Orwell had seen war and death on a mass level and also personally. He lived through both world wars and experienced the German blitz on England in the early 1940s. Is the age that Orwell inhabited now over? Has the world crossed the threshold into postmodernity?

It was attending the November 1998 'Media Wars' conference that put this particular issue back on the table for me personally. It raised a central question that confronts journalists, journalism educators and cultural theorists: Is there such a thing as postmodern journalism?

Orwell was most definitely a creature of the age of modernity. Can anyone say otherwise? Most sensible postmodernists would agree that postmodernity begins with the atom bomb⁷. By the end of World War 2 Orwell was sick with

⁷ I got this impression from my former colleague at UWS, Dr Maria Angel. For her (and I'm sure she read it somewhere) the postmodern condition (if such exists) began with the bombing of

tuberculosis and *prematurely* coming to the end of his productive life. Twenty years later - at the close of the 1960s - according to some postmodernists, the Enlightenment journey was over, and “emancipatory promise [gave] way to disillusionment and abandonment of any kind of transformative politics” (Wark 1998c, p.36).

Is modernity over?

This is a crucial question for the development of this thesis. It will hang over the rest of this work and it may never be fully answered to anyone’s satisfaction. Much of the debate hinges on attitudes to the failure of socialists to decisively change the world in 1968 - the so-called ‘summer of love’.

In ‘It’s time to smash the sixties’, Ken Wark (1998c) paraphrases Foucault and Deleuze’s view that by 1968 “Marxist militants” were “little more than mirror images of the State apparatus they opposed - a wannabe State in waiting”. In Wark’s view these ‘Marxists’ (large sections of the French intelligentsia, students and workers) were imagining “a wannabe State in waiting” - the kind of society in which institutions “...make people internalise unthinking obedience and self-restraint” (Wark 1998c, p.36).

He then outlines “what I think Foucault was on about”, to enunciate an alternative and thoroughly ‘postmodern’ politics:

...where institutions exist so that people might develop and enhance their individual and collective potential. To some, this sounds like a return to liberalism; but, if so, it is a liberalism without compromise.
(Wark 1998c, p.36)

I’ll return to this question later, but for McKenzie Wark, the history of this debate is unimportant:

Whether this kind of politics is modern or postmodern, whether it is a break with the sixties or its legacy, doesn’t seem to me to be a particularly interesting question. It could only be answered in the end by detailed studies of particular cultural histories, not by

Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Along with the holocaust this is one of secular humanism’s darkest moments.

reshuffling the categories of social theory. (Wark 1998c, p.36)

I find this a fascinating question and so to do the postmodernists, despite half-hearted claims to the contrary. They do care, precisely because the validity of their claims rests on dismantling the historical stories (the grand narrative?) of real social movements and real people, acting individually and collectively.

What for example was the relationship between the students and workers of Paris '68 and the students and workers of Prague - just down the road really - who were doing exactly the same things almost at the same time as the Parisienne radicals. The only difference was that in Czechoslovakia the targets were Russian-controlled infrastructure and Russian tanks (Birchall 1974).

Finally, it is the second part of Wark's statement that I find most amusing. 'Modernism is over,' shout the postmodernists from ivory towers and popular pulpits⁸. 'We now live in a thoroughly postmodern world', they interject at every opportunity, before adding, 'but we don't want to have to defend ourselves.' However, there is no evidence presented (apart from a few 'texts', and other people's cultural studies papers). Instead there is a constant "shuffling the categories of social theory" (Wark 1998c, p.36). *Are we or aren't we living in a postmodern world?*

The most commonsense 'definition' of the *epoch of postmodernism* I've come across is Frederic Jameson's essay in *The Cultural Turn* (1998c), 'Marxism and Postmodernism':

This is a transitional period between two stages of capitalism, in which the earlier forms of the economic are in the process of being restructured on a global scale, including the oldest forms of labour and its traditional organizational institutions and concepts. That a new international proletariat (taking forms we cannot yet imagine) will reemerge from this convulsive upheaval it needs no prophet to predict; we ourselves are still in a trough though, however, and no

⁸ Associate Professor Catharine Lumby is a regular guest commentator on cultural matters and media for the ABC. She also has a semi-regular column in the *Bulletin*. Ken Wark was a very regular columnist in *the Australian's* HES each Wednesday for several years in the late 1990s.

one can say how long we will stay there. (Jameson 1998c, pp.48-49)

There's a lot to 'unpack' here, some of it good, some of it still up-in-the-air.

Postmodernism is a transitional period between two stages of capitalism. OK, that sounds reasonable to a Marxist like me.

Earlier forms of production are being restructured. There's something in here for both the postmodernists and the Marxists. Certainly there is debate about the technological form (Williams 1974, 1980c) of new media and assessment of its impact on cultural histories (Hinkson 1996; Barr 2000).

There's hope in the proles. Thank Orwell! *But we're in the shit.* Thank Gramsci!

The academic and media debates appear to concede 'no contest'. Modernity finished in the 1960s according to some (Wark 1998c), while others bemoan the 'killing of history' (Windschuttle 1994). What is agreed on by most is that journalism and news were (are) the 'sense-makers' of modernity (Hartley 1996, 1999a, 1999b; Meadows 1998a, 1998b, 1999). In the words of the MEAA Code of Ethics, journalists interpret and explain the world to their audiences.

As you would expect, this thesis argues my position on this question, which is this:

The postmodern is an emergent set of cultural and social relations (Williams 1980b) which has not yet fully articulated itself. The cultural impact of this emergent form is being noticed in the visual and plastic arts; architecture and in scholarship. As John Hartley has rightly noted, as a phenomenon, postmodernism has also penetrated many genres of popular culture and work (Hartley 1996). In a sense, one could argue that the postmodern 'condition' represents an emerging, but not yet fully articulated, emotional dialectic, based on new forms of relations of production. To be honest, *I'm not sure*.

Like any emergent social or cultural 'movement', postmodernism is full of argument and contradiction - even to the extent that there is disagreement about the very existence of the 'post-modern condition' (Jameson 1991, 1998a,b,c). As Orwell (1984, p10) might say - I am for postmodernism, "as I understand it".

This thesis is also about history and historical change. I disagree with postmodern theorists who argue that we have witnessed an epochal change of

revolutionary proportions - the ‘information revolution’ (Hinkson 1996; Barr 2000) - that would justify saying that we do inhabit a full-blown postmodern world. The second part of my debate with cultural studies is to argue that modernity is not yet over. The age of late monopoly capitalism (Braverman 1974, Callinicos 1989) is still with us and the ‘gravediggers’ - the working class - are yet to take to history’s stage. As an easily forgettable popular music act of *later modernism* might sing: “It ain’t over till it’s over”.

The aesthetics and politics of good prose: The motivation to write a thesis

I knew that I had a facility with words and a power of facing unpleasant facts. (Orwell 1984a, p.7)

“Putting aside the need to earn a living,” George Orwell believed there are “four great motives for writing”, which he lists as “Sheer egoism”; “Aesthetic enthusiasm”; “Historical impulse” and “Political purpose” (1984a, pp.9-10). I am writing this thesis for the same reasons. Taken together, and given an explanatory overview, these four great motives inspire the methodologies and the emotional dialectic of *both* grey collar journalism and this thesis. This section comments on how each of Orwell’s motives can be applied to both. This is followed by an outline of the grey collar method.

Sheer egoism

Serious writers, I should say, are on the whole more vain and self-centred than journalists, though less interested in money. (Orwell 1984a, p.9)

This is perhaps the least honourable motive for writing, but “writers share this characteristic with scientists, artists, politicians, lawyers, soldiers [and] successful business men”. Of course, there’s a certain amount of ego involved in thinking that one can even manage to write a PhD, to be “remembered after death” (Orwell 1984a, p.9).

However, it is more than this. It is also a belief that the value of what one has to say should be shared around. In this sense, writing is the product of those “who are determined to live their own lives”, but also to “live chiefly for others”

(Orwell 1984a, p.9). This too is a motive for my writing: to make a small contribution to the collective egoism of my world.

Aesthetic enthusiasm

Above the level of a railway guide, no book is quite free from aesthetic considerations (Orwell 1984a, p.9)

This is, at one level, related to egoism in that it is a desire “to share an experience which one feels is valuable and ought not to be missed” (Orwell 1984a, p.9). It is also the sheer pleasure of word-processing, a recognition of the beauty “in words and their right arrangement”. For Orwell it is found “in the impact of one sound on another, in the firmness of good prose or the rhythm of a good story” (Orwell 1984a, p.9). Agreed. I have taken great pleasure in writing this thesis, though it has been “a horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness” (Orwell 1984a, p.12).

Aesthetics are also important to the grey collar newswriter *as intellectual* because they are necessary considerations in the discussion of journalism, modernity and postmodernity. John Hartley has written, “journalism is a prime site for postmodernisation” (1999a, p.27), it exists within a public space, “the domain of common-knowledge” (Hartley 1999a, p.19) and personal consumption that has become “aestheticized” (Hartley 1996, 1999a, 1999b).

This thesis takes issue with Hartley’s claims for a popular and postmodern journalism that has supplanted more serious ‘modernist’ journalism. I disagree, in particular, with his suggestion that an “aestheticized” journalism of politics has replaced serious and contested analysis of social issues. However, it is important to recognise that as an ‘emergent’ cultural form, postmodernism exists in the media, as in other areas of cultural and social life. I agree with John Hartley that both journalists and journalism educators must come to terms with “the intellectual developments that go under the name of postmodernism” (Hartley 1999a, p.26). Having said that, it is still my contention that Hartley is wrong to believe that, postmodern journalism is the further “democratisation of modern life”, a terrain where “modernist journalism is apparently not equipped to follow”:

If anyone has taken serious notice of the democratising potential of

popular and postmodern forms of journalism, it seems to be those pests from cultural studies, rather than journalism educators themselves. The latter are holding the line between modernism (truth and power) and postmodernism (fantasy and identity). (Hartley 1999a, p.28)

I couldn't have put it better myself and I'm happy to be one of those 'holding the line'. That is why 'historical impulse' is a strong motivator for me to produce this work.

Historical impulse

Desire to see things as they are, to find out true facts and store them up for the use of posterity. (Orwell 1984a, p.9)

The grey collar thesis turns on questions of history, of facts, facticity, truthfulness and storing them up for the use of future generations. And history is an important area of debate in relation to the modernity - postmodernity question. According to NSW Premier, Bob Carr, history is "the summation of many stories"⁹ and this thesis certainly has that historicity about it.

This thesis is concerned with the historically determined facts surrounding the economic, social, political and cultural conditions under which journalism is produced and consumed. In short it seeks to answer the question posed earlier: What creates the emotional dialectic of the front-page? It is also informed by a desire "to see things as they are" and therefore to explore the questions that the history of newswork generates for both journalism education and cultural studies.

Political purpose

Desire to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other people's idea of the kind of society that they should strive after...no [writer] is genuinely free from political bias. (Orwell 1984a, p.10)

⁹ The comments attributed to Bob Carr in this chapter are taken from an interview conducted by Sally Loane on ABC radio in Sydney on 25 January 2002. Refer to *Pounding the beat: Journalism and Media Archaeology* below.

I have no doubt that if egoism is the basest of motives for writing, political purpose is the highest. Ever since I conceived of this project, at the beginning of my academic career in 1993, I knew basically what I wanted to say and in which direction I wished to “push the world”. I am a socialist, a former grey collar journalist and now a grey collar academic¹⁰.

I make no apology for placing myself decisively in the camp of the Marxists, though I am careful to qualify this by reference to the work of socialists who have thoroughly rejected the ossified ‘theory’ of the Stalinists. I am an international socialist (lower case deliberate), but I’m also interested in the debate about “postmodern socialism” (Beilharz 1994). Though to be frank, I doubt that such a construct would survive in the real world.

Though not discussed in great detail, my own experiences as a reporter and editor invariably influence my opinions. I have worked in political journalism and current affairs reporting and believe that the reporting of politics is the most fundamentally important role of journalism in the modern world. Politics is almost completely (deliberately?) shut off from what most of us do in our every day lives, yet the decisions taken by elected officials, often with the advice of (or at the insistence of) unelected bureaucrats can have profound impacts on our lives. The coverage of politics - in a way that explains it to ordinary ‘folk’ and gives them in ‘in’ - is (or at least should be) the *raison d’être* of the public sphere and journalism’s role in a broad and open debate.

That journalism is not like this has always caused me a deep and nagging concern that has led me to focus attention on the politics of newswork. *Why is it so?* I’ve never been too keen on conspiracy theories, though no doubt there are conspiracies (for example the execution of JFK in 1963 was almost certainly a *coup d’état*¹¹), rather I have spent the past decade looking for an answer. I think I’ve found it with the grey collar thesis and the emotional dialectic.

¹⁰ This is discussed in Chapter 8: *Killing me softly*.

¹¹ Any one who doubts this should watch Oliver Stone’s remarkable movie, *JFK*. For those who’ve seen it, can there be any doubt?

A note on the grey collar method

Mithra Cox, a 23 year-old Melbourne woman has been evicted from her flat for hanging a poster saying “free the refugees” in her window. (ABC radio news, 25 January 2002)

The ‘rank-and-file’ approach to theory

The ‘rank-and-file’ approach to theories of newswork and journalism is well articulated by Hanno Hardt and Bonnie Brennen in their introduction to *Newsworkers: Towards a history of the rank-and-file* (1995). Hardt and Brennen are highly critical of mainstream histories of the press which “present ideologically predisposed accounts that fail to consider the issues of work and class” (vii), instead they argue “for a reconceptualization of press history as a history of work” (ix). These are sentiments I whole-heartedly endorse and try to emulate in this work.

Memoir and biography

From the individual’s point of view, the meaning of work is constructed out of past experience, present aims, expectations of the future, and those factors in the social situation which support or oppose him [sic] in his lifetime search for meaningful work.
(Krause 1971, p.34)

Elliott Krause (1971) argues that a biographical method is valid and extremely useful in the sociology of occupations. It is an experiential approach from the perspective in the individual ‘insider’ that helps the researcher understand the emotional and psychological impact of career socialisation. In terms of Krause’s sociology of occupations we can define journalism as one of the “near professions” which are “continually engaged in professionalizing,” and the recruitment of an “ongoing and changing group” (1971, p.49). This is particularly significant in the case of generational change in the journalists’ ranks based on changing educational standards of entry:

[the] formal training process makes on a member of a vanguard; the older occupational group members become an embarrassment and are relegated to marginal statuses under a grandfather clause.

(Krause 1971, p.49)¹²

The types of writing that comes closest to a rank-and-file history of journalism are the memoirs, biographies and autobiographies of reporters and former newswriters. A recent contemporary discussion of British journalism in this style is Matthew Engel's *Tickle the Public: One hundred years of the Popular Press* (1996). Engel worked on Fleet Street for 25 years, many of them at *The Guardian* and goes to some length to distance himself from academic historians "with no direct experience at all of the practice of journalism" (Engel 1996, p.9). According to Engel, "distortion is by-product of the way news is gathered, written, subbed and 'altered' on its journey through the newsroom".

Since Keith Windschuttle's landmark text, *The Media* (1988), has fallen into disuse, Australian theories of the press exhibit this same failure – not acknowledging the role of class and work. Instead they rely on liberal and pluralist notions of the Fourth Estate which are institutional in nature (Schultz 1994, 1998)¹³. While they make the obligatory, but cursory, nod towards Marxism and the tradition of political economy, they don't account for a history of the 'rank-and-file'. My thesis is a first step in redressing this balance and placing the social relations of news production at the core of media and cultural theories of the press, television and news.

It is a central concern of the grey collar thesis that these very industrial processes of newspaper production create "the distorting mirrors of the seaside' from which 'the image comes out elongated or compressed" (Engel 1996, p.272). I have collected, read and analysed many similar examples while researching the grey collar thesis.

Participant-observation

Participant–observation studies like Peter Putnis's *A day in the life of Channel 10 News* (1993, pp.112–122) and Margaret Simons' (1999) two weeks in the Canberra Press Gallery are also invaluable tools for analysing journalism as work. There's plenty of scope for further studies in this area: for example a

¹² This issue is dealt with in detail in Chapter 6: *Where were you on November 11?*

¹³ The Fourth Estate is addressed in Chapter 7: *Profitability and Public Interest*.

thorough review of the memoirs, biographies and autobiographies of and by newswriters. I have done my own participant-observation studies and interviewed a number of political reporters whom I met and worked alongside in the Canberra Press Gallery in 1991 and 1992. The interviews were conducted on various research trips to Canberra, the last one coinciding with the 1998 Republic Convention at Old Parliament House.

These recorded and transcribed sessions covered material relating to the central claim of the thesis that the contradictory class-consciousness of grey collar journalists is reflected in their political attitudes to their work. These interviews are not the subject of a separate chapter, but are used as illustrative *asides* where appropriate.

The 'newspaper novel'

I have also used fictional accounts of the working lives of newswriters and the newspaper industry. Many are based loosely on known history and others are definitely autobiographical. This may seem an unusual process in a thesis that is mainly about political economy and cultural studies, but it is a legitimate use of 'primary source material'. It is a methodology pioneered by American media sociologist Bonnie Brennen, as a way of gathering "insights into aspects of media history that have not been explored previously" (Brennen 1995, p.75). Brennen provides a compelling series of arguments for accepting "newspaper novels", often written by former and practising journalists, as "realistic representations of the newspaper world" (1995, p.80).

Pounding the beat: An archaeology of news texts

On election night, 13 November 2001, in complete disgust at the Howard victory, a bunch of friends and I decided to hang a banner over the Great Western Highway at Valley Heights, near my home in Springwood. The banner read: REFUGEES ARE WELCOME. We climbed into cars and launched our commando-style raid on the footbridge between the car park and the railway station. This was our small protest, an expression of a shared emotional attitude to the shameful acts of an emotionally bankrupt government. The banner stayed up until lunchtime the following day.

In late January I was walking down the main street in the town where I was living at the time, I saw some graffiti - FREE THE REFUGEES - scrawled on the footpath outside several shops and a bank.

A day later I heard the item about Mithra Cox while driving to the library to photocopy some material and check up one-last-time on Raymond Williams. On the same day, the news media was full of stories about refugees who were on a hunger strike in an isolated 'detention centre' near the town of Woomera, in the heat of the South Australian desert. This became the story of Australia Day 2002 and ran continuously over the long-weekend (26-28 January). Following this story constituted my last 'dig' in the necessary media archaeology for this thesis.

I had already written some aspects of the media's coverage of Australia's 'refugee crisis' into this thesis (see Chapter 4). I had already begun the process of what I have come to call media archaeology - drilling down through a 'core sample' of stories and putting aside 'artefacts' that can explain a great deal about the society that produced them. By sifting the layers and by chronological ordering ('carbon-dating') the artefacts (texts) we can trace the emotional dialectic of the front-page as the story unfolds over any given time-frame (days, weeks, months or years). Further, the accretion of layers in the media's treatment of an issue over time can also be sorted by 'author'. This coding method can explain a lot about the 'emotional attitudes' of the reporters assigned to a story (the beat) which comes across in the choices they make about angles, issues, sources and story structure.

An archaeology of the text

It is important to distinguish my methodology from Michel Foucault's institutional approach in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972). Foucault is examining the ways in which ideas might be transmitted through institutions – the asylum, or the prison for example – and through tradition (Cousins & Hussain 1984, p.79). My approach is less grand and more easily understood in the traditional sense of archaeology – the uncovering of facts and hypotheses through the careful process of locating, digging, sifting and classifying or artefacts. Unlike Foucault, I do not suspend the category of history, but rather embrace it.

In earlier days of gathering material and writing drafts of this thesis I might have called this process ‘content analysis’ to give it a more scholarly ring and make it *sound like* a methodology. But archaeology is what it is. Archaeologists rarely find a whole city or site intact. Instead they deduce from the evidence collected. They conduct what John Hartley might describe as a “textual analysis” (Hartley 1996, 1999a, p.19) of the found materials - the artefacts. From this process we deduce information about the objects themselves - how they were constructed, what they might have been used for and the symbolic meanings that they conveyed in the emotional dialectics of the culture that produced them. More importantly, we learn about the culture itself from a ‘reading’ of these artefacts. But archaeology is about more than cleaning, arranging and ‘reading’ artefacts. It requires alliances with other disciplines in order to fully articulate the purpose and value of the objects of study. So it is with journalism and the media:

...textual analysis is not abstract, decontextualised or abstractly political, but on the contrary is a form of historiography; a ‘method’ of demonstrating just how meanings are embedded in history, in a sense of who ‘we’ are, and in a network of other texts, contexts, meanings and dialogue without which they cannot be explained.
(Hartley 1999a, p.19)

I endorse this view and so, in order to explain news ‘texts’ in their context and dialogue with society, this thesis adopts a range of methodologies and is therefore ‘cross-disciplinary’. Alongside the archaeology of the media I have drawn on the traditions of political economy, sociology and cultural studies. I do so from the perspective of dialectical materialism:

When we reflect on Nature, or the history of mankind, or our own intellectual activity, the first picture presented to us is of an endless maze of relations and interactions, in which nothing remains what, where and as it was, but everything moves, changes, comes into being and passes out of existence. (Engels, Anti-Dühring, cited in Solomon 1979, p.26)

Materialism & Sociology: Theorising newswork

In order to fully understand and appreciate the news 'text' we must put it into some more analytical context and begin to question not just the words and the images, but the social relations under which the text was produced. This tradition - the examination of the newsroom and news production process - is broadly the sociology of news. It has been common in western scholarship for decades and can be traced back to a number of American sociologists in the 1930s, in particular the Chicago school around Robert Park, himself a journalist-turned-academic. In a more recent and appropriate context, Michael Schudson (1997, pp.7-22) outlines several useful approaches to the sociology of news as work under the following headings:

- ? The political economy of news;
- ? The social organisation of news work;
- ? culturological approaches which include content analysis.

These methods are each useful in their own way and are taken up in this work. However, they can also be subject to some criticism; in particular Schudson's reproach that they, "are often inclined to ignore the possibilities for change in the nature of newswork" (1997, p.20). In effect, they do not recognise or explain the emotional dialectic of the front-page. Schudson's insight prompts me to ask if this critique may be generalised to a failure, within the discipline of media sociology, to understand the dialectical nature of news production and its relationship to the wider system of commodity production. In the body of this work I provide some answers to this question, particularly in relation to liberal-democratic theories of the Fourth Estate (Schultz 1998) and the media theory produced by the relatively modern school of Cultural Studies (Hartley 1996).

A political economy of news production

The grey collar thesis suggests that news is perhaps 'contested', in the sense that the practices and products of journalism are buffeted by contradiction and by competing social pressures. In a sense it is a struggle for the hearts and minds of the newswriters. I would expect there to be some evidence of this given my exposition of a 'duality' to news as a product of a cultural, yet distinctly

commodity-based production process. This argument is tested in the thesis using a number of empirical indicators, such as the Henningham and Schultz¹⁴ surveys over several years and my own interviews with political journalists suggest it to be worth pursuing.

In this thesis, I'm making several related arguments in favour of a materialist, dialectical and explicitly Marxist theoretical framework for the analysis of journalism as work. This is an approach to what I have come to call the 'labour theory of journalism'¹⁵. I am suggesting that in order to understand the journalistic product, we need to understand all dimensions of the production process. This is more than the limited and institutional role assigned to political economy by some media sociologists and cultural theorists.

The sociology of the newsroom

While I can agree with my colleague Eric Louw that, "political economists would be interested in examining the possible relationship between the content of *The Australian* and the fact that this newspaper is part of a corporation owned by Rupert Murdoch" (Louw 2001, p.2), it really is more than that. In his study of television newswork, Ehrlich makes a distinction between a political economy approach and the "study of the social organization of news" (1997, p.303), but in my view this is misguided. The study of the social relations of production in the newsroom, if done properly, is precisely the terrain of political economy.

The exploitative and alienated nature of labour common to our age might be expected to exist in any newsroom organised according to the principles of capitalist commodity production. Consequently, a study of working conditions in the news industry might produce some useful material about the relationship between the production process and news selection. In this work the framing and placement of news content - the emotional dialectic of the front-page - is analysed from the perspective of news as "popular reality" (Hartley 1996) and as a component of the hegemonic dialectic of ruling class ideologies.

¹⁴ This issue is pursued in Chapter 7: *Profitability and the Public Interest*.

¹⁵ This is fully articulated, explored and defended in Chapter 3: *Hard Yakka*.

Experienced 'living' The politics of popular reality

As noted above, the 'culturological' approach includes the methods of textual analysis, but it must be more than this. It must also explore cultural questions as indicators of lived experience, "routine pleasures and personal consumption, of corporate entertainment strategies and the privatised maintenance of common knowledge" (Hartley 1999, p.19). At the same time we must examine the political implications of lived and living culture. We must understand the ideological assumptions and 'pick through' the political ideas embedded in popular reality. In particular, I am interested in looking at the social forces that impact on newswriters to make them produce the various 'artefacts' of the emotional dialectic that my digging and sifting have uncovered. This is best characterised by what American media sociologist Warren Breed (1997) described as the problem of "social control" in the news production process.

Journalism and Politics

I combine my interest in political economy, with a passion for the *politics of journalism* and personal interest in *political journalism*. These streams are brought together in this thesis as a result of several factors:

- ?? my early work in political economy as an undergraduate student in the 1970s and my continuing interest in this field;
- ?? my training in the materialist and dialectical methods of classical Marxism and a firm belief in the explanatory powers of this intellectual tradition;
- ?? my activist philosophy and history as a trade union militant throughout my working life; and
- ?? the result of spending some very enjoyable years working as a journalist, including a stint in the Canberra Press Gallery.

The dual nature of the grey collar thesis

The combination of my personal and professional interest in making 'better' journalism and leads to argue for a duality in the grey collar theory. Firstly the thesis is an argument about the economics of news production (most journalists

are workers and most media is Capital¹⁶), secondly it's an argument about the cultural, social and political nature of newswork - dialectic of the front-page as expressed in both news 'texts' and news 'practices'.

As explained throughout this thesis, grey collar is both a category of labour and a point on the axis of emotional attitudes. A grey collar journalist can be either a conscious 'leftie' like former press gallery correspondent Mungo MacCallum, or a rank-and-file sub-editor on the Fairfax graveyard shift. It is not about what school you went to, or whether your father was a miner or a diplomat. Grey collar is both an objective location in the structure of capitalist production processes, and a state of mind - a class-consciousness that is publicly expressed as an emotional attitude to newswork. I argue for the term grey collar on the basis of an understanding of the contradictory location of newsworkers in what Nicos Poulantzas (1975) calls the new petty bourgeoisie. This class can never have a truly independent existence under monopoly capitalism it is constantly buffeted by the larger social weight of the ruling class and the proletariat. The principal determinant of their consciousness is economic – the relations of production (Poulantzas 1975, p.209) – which, under monopoly conditions drives them towards the working class:

From medicine through to the liberal professions (law, architecture, etc.), and including entertainment and the media, the agents providing services have overwhelmingly become employees of capital, which has seized hold of their activities.
(Poulantzas 1975, p.215, emphasis added)

For newsworkers this provides the overwhelming weight of determination, but their role in the production and reproduction of the rule of Capital does impact upon the extent of this economic determination. The following section argues that this conflict flows over into the *content* of the news.

¹⁶ Throughout this work I capitalise Capital to signal that I'm talking about a specific social relation, which is explained in Chapter 3: *Hard Yakka*.

So we know what I'm talking about

It is my belief that the dialectic of the front-page expresses the emotional dialectic of an age or epoch. It is dialectic because it is contested terrain. The class struggle finds expression in this contest, which is between dominant and emergent forms of consciousness. In order to proceed to an expatiation of this thesis it is necessary to provide some definitions of important terms and concepts.

The market place of ideas

The background noise to the production of the grey collar thesis is the traditional and dominant intellectual position in media studies that finds expression in the emotional dialectic of newswork as 'Fourth Estate'. That is, the media is part of the system of 'checks and balances' in a liberal-democratic market society like contemporary Australia. I argue elsewhere in this work¹⁷ that this position is itself an ideological construct with limited explanatory power. Here I wish only to outline some of the arguments that inform and underpin other sections of the thesis.

Do liberals dream of democratic markets?

According to Donald Horne, the common 'myths' of modern capitalism are the, "free market place of ideas"; "the rationality of the economic market"; "free speech and a free press"; "freedom of association"; and of "free choice between political parties". The interlocking of these myths provides the basic infrastructure of understanding in which political debate in capitalist liberal-democracies takes place (Horne, 1986, p.129). Donald Horne recognises that it can be argued that these 'myths' support the rule of capital. Nevertheless, he suggests:

...if all these particular 'myths' of liberalism are to be dismissed as suited only to the advantage of the privileged in capitalist societies, there is, to put it mildly, a problem for those who want a better world. (Horne 1986, p.130)

¹⁷ Refer specifically to chapter 7: *Profitability & Public Interest*.

Horne's frame of reference for a comparison of the liberal-democratic 'myth' is the 'myth' of collectivism, which he demonstrates has not worked in the Stalinist eastern bloc countries, the USSR and China. From a position *within and supporting*, liberal democracy in its capitalist guise, Horne argues that the 'collectivist' cultures are marked by:

crass determinism [which] is combined with an equally crass voluntarism in which all kinds of exhortations are made for an increased exercise of the human will. (Horne 1986, p.138)

I have a fundamental disagreement with this position, which I believe is based on a deep misunderstanding of the nature of the so-called 'socialist' bloc. It is a misunderstanding deeply ingrained in the emotional dialectic of modernity (and postmodernity). The collapse of what I prefer to call the 'state-capitalist'¹⁸ regimes beginning with the Soviet Union in 1989, re-opened the debate on what kind of societies existed behind the Iron Curtain; while Tiananmen Square in 1989 lifted the veil on the real situation in China. However, Donald Horne could not know of this in 1986. So, finally he returns to the 'myths' of 'liberal democracy' to support his position, but by the close of *The Public Culture*, they are no longer invested with the potential for class conflict, they are "neutral"; they are "the 'myths' of modernity". (Horne 1986, p.244)

In the "critic's culture", which Horne is advocating to replace Australian 'public culture', competition and property would be replaced by, "co-operation, greater equality and human freedom." (1986, p.245) But at the same time, Horne can support the 'myths' of "national identity". He argues that to be truly "internationalist, one must first be national." (1986, p.244) This is a contradiction that Horne cannot address, and he falls into the same gap as Castles et.al (1988), precisely because of his support for the 'myths' of liberalism and the nation state. Capitalism has created these 'myths' as part of the hegemonic dialectic of

¹⁸ The 'state-capitalist' thesis of the Soviet bloc, China, Cuba and Eastern Europe prior to 1989 was developed by Tony Cliff in his seminal work *State Capitalism in Russia* (Cliff 1988). This position on so-called 'socialist' societies argues that "the basic dynamic of Russian society, accumulation for accumulation's sake, production for production's sake, is in the last resort the same as in Western capitalism" (Birchall 1974, p.234)

emotions and the ideological armoury needed control dissent, and for the handling of economic, political and military disputes between its various component geographic parts. The 'liberalism' to which Donald Horne refers, "concerned not with property but with human relationships", has been tried and has failed. Curran (1991) notes that liberal democratic and free market ideas have also been effectively rebuked in the field of media studies. He describes the media "industry" as a "zone of influence in which dominant economic forces have a privileged position, and to which other significant social forces are denied direct, unmediated access." (1991, p.94)

The culture/society dichotomy

culture - a particular state or stage of civilisation. Macquarie
Dictionary

Is culture a collection of artefacts, or is it lived experience? To provide an answer we can turn to the work of Raymond Williams. His role as the 'godfather' of cultural studies¹⁹ can be traced through a number of Williams' positions; the development of 'cultural materialism'; a confusion between competing definitions of 'culture'; and his initial support for, and later abandonment of a 'determining' role for relations of production. I suggest that once the concept of over-determination, by relations of production, is removed and 'cultural production' becomes co-determinant within the social formation; the relevance of class, to both politics and theory, is lessened. It is my strong view that the concept of the emotional dialectic cannot be understood without reference to class and some form of determination by the relations of production.

Dichotomous Cultures?

There is a consistent confusion in Williams and in much postmodernist theory between 'culture' as 'society' and 'culture' as the 'artefacts' of the process of 'cultural production'. This is evident in the way that Williams jumps between two concepts: from 'culture' as the sum total of lived experience (1983, p.140) to the artefacts of 'popular culture' as "jokes and gossip, of everyday singing and

¹⁹ See chapter 2: *Raymond Williams - On culture and economy*.

dancing, of occasional dressing-up and extravagant outbursts of colour” (1983, p.146).

The dichotomy in cultural studies, between culture and society is itself the product of postmodernists taking on the modernist ideology that puts 'culture' on a pedestal outside both politics and economics (Milner 1993, p.3). Hence, we might suggest that the postmodernist fetishism of cultural theory to the exclusion of political economy, is the re-ification of culture as somehow 'outside' economics and therefore, not subject to what Marx describes as the 'iron laws' of history.

Within postmodernism (and cultural studies more generally) there is a fascination with phenomena divorced from their material, 'generative' sources. Milner (1993, p.4) suggests that this is 'initially the creation of European Romanticism' and its trajectory into postmodernism is easily traceable via art, architecture and literary criticism. This is directly linked to Raymond Williams' critique of the Marxist base-superstructure model and the theory of determination by the base²⁰. A review of Williams' position allows us to map out some basic definitions of 'culture'; 'society'; 'ideology'; 'hegemony' and 'determinism'. A useful place to find these terms is in *Keywords* (Williams 1989).

Culture and 'cultural production'.

culture - the action or practice of cultivating the soil

culture - the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings, which is transmitted from generation to generation.

Macquarie Dictionary

By the mid 18th Century, 'culture' became a common noun in both English and German, with both concrete and abstract properties. Its many antecedents make it “one of the two or three most complicated word in the English language” (Williams 1989, p.87). It therefore makes sense only to really talk about cultures in the plural, “specific and variable” in place and time, as well as to “social and economic groups within a nation” (Williams 1989, p.89). In this sense we use 'culture' to mean a matrix of everyday practices, of “lived experiences”.

²⁰ See chapter 2.

The construct of the emotional dialectic is built on Williams' useful terminology 'residual' and 'emergent' culture. The idea that an 'oppositional, or 'alternative' cultural dialectic can exist alongside, or within, a dominant culture, is framed by this context (Williams 1980b; Milner 1993, p57). Williams relates the phrase 'emergent' culture, as does Gramsci (1971), to the development of a new class, based on emerging relations of production and he counterposes this to 'residual' earlier forms, such as organised religion. Clearly this is how Trotsky uses the term 'culture' in *Literature and revolution* (1971). However, not all 'emergent' cultures are 'oppositional', some are merely 'alternative'. The trade union movement and grunge music represent elements of both; and quite clearly, both are subject to integration with capitalism. Emergent cultures are dialectically the products of their time and place - they express elements of an emotional dialectic and bring with them new forms of this expression. I will return to this argument later I relation to postmodern journalism, but now want to look at the other definition of culture as a *production process in its own right* - the production of cultural artefacts and entertainments. This is an important step because, it can be argued, journalism is a form of cultural production.

The artefacts of cultural theory

Milner traces 'cultural production' into the work of Raymond Williams from the English critic, F. R. Leavis; and Williams' many published works on theatre, television and literature show that it occupied a great amount of his time and effort. In this sense 'culture' embraces the arts, whether 'high' or 'popular'. It is following this definition that 'cultural theory' derives most of its intellectual and academic weight. Cultural theory, despite some gestures towards Williams' first definition, in fact concentrates its efforts on the latter, the production of cultural artefacts. Culture (as production of artefact) has been removed from its place within the broader framework of culture (as lived experience). As we shall see, this has implications for the base-superstructure model and for the concept of determinism. But first it is time to introduce the second keyword: *society*.

Society and culture

In a general sense, 'society' and 'culture', as synonyms for 'lived experience', are interchangeable. They are both created by the complex interplay of social forces in dialectical cooperation and competition. They are terms that describe

the sum total of institutions and emotional attitudes that constitute a social formation. Society is both a general term, for the institutions and relationships that structure our lives; and as the “most abstract term for the conditions in which such institutions and relationships are formed” (Williams 1983, p. 291). It is the Gramscian notion of ‘civil society’. In Williams’ terms, “society is that to which we all belong, even if it is all so general and impersonal; the *state* is the apparatus of power” (1983, p.293). Williams suggests another use which is relevant here; that of the idea of society as being a structure, against which other things can be measured: for instance, “the individual *and* society”; or a special part of the whole, “*high* society” (1983, p.293). This has important methodological implications for sociology in general and cultural theory in particular; especially if we note, as Williams does, its preferred term ‘community’, devoid of any class content at all (1983, p.295). In *Culture and Society* the authors note that a distinction is made between the two terms in 20th century anthropology and sociology and that ‘culture’ is defined as both an abstraction and an absolute (Billington, Strawbridge, Greensides & Fitzsimons 1991, p.7). They note that in this view, culture “is something which overarches, reflects and ultimately has its own effect on the social” (Billington, et. al. 1991, p.9).

In a Marxist schema, society can be understood as the social formation; the political, social and cultural structures that ‘carry’ the emotional attitudes and ideologies of an epoch. Society is built on the basis of productive human activity, but also includes a dialectic in which these structures in turn impact upon the relations and forces of production. This is expressed as a sociological perspective, such as that adopted by the Frankfurt school, which suggests oppositional ‘cultures’ (as the production of artefacts) are “vital to counteracting the economic and social values of capitalism” (Billington, et. al., p.17). In particular, this position characterises the debate about the ‘bad’ aspects of mass culture in an industrial society and seeks to mythologise an ideal ‘oppositional’ cultural practice, whether it is ‘folk’ culture, or new forms such as postmodernism in art, literature music and even journalism. In *Towards 2000* Raymond Williams himself criticises this position as “cultural pessimism” with its roots firmly in an elitist conception of ‘culture’ (1983, pp.134-135). The theoretical endpoint of this

trend is in a “sociology of culture” Billington, et. al. 1991, p.21) devoid of any discussion of relations of production, outside the realm of 'cultural production' itself.

Ideology and the ideological

The third important term to define is 'ideology', which, in a perjorative sense, has come to mean, “abstract, impractical of fanatical theory” (Williams 1989, p.154). According to Williams (1989, p.155), in the *German Ideology*, Marx and Engels polemically describe ideology as the ruling ideas of an epoch and in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx wrote that ideology is:

“nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas.”

(Cited in Williams 1989, p.115)

From the perspective of this thesis we can understand ideology as the sum total of individual and collective (shared) emotional attitudes which combine into the over-arching narrative of a society. It is, therefore, worth noting the different uses of 'ideology' as outlined by Raymond Williams.

1. An 'upside-down' version of reality arising from the topsy-turvy reality of history (from the *German Ideology*). In the *Theses on Feuerbach*, Engels suggested that people who think ideologically do so unconsciously: in ways which don't account for the fact that the material circumstances of their lives determine, “in the last resort”, how they think. In this instance, ideology is a process of thought derived from pure thought; hence, it is false consciousness.
2. Ideology is thought of as belonging to a particular class, for example 'bourgeois' and 'proletarian' ideology. This begs the question, what does a proletarian ideology look like? Its corollary question is: Can there be any proletarian consciousness within capitalism? In a sense, ‘yes’, because class-consciousness is constantly in the process of ‘emerging’ and dialectically challenging the hegemonic discourse (the dominant ideology).
3. Williams notes, again following Marx and Engels, that ruling class ideologists reproduce the dominant ideas and make them palatable to a working class audience. We come across this concept of ideology in Herman

and Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent* (1986) though some would argue in a mechanistic and deterministic fashion, closer to conspiracy theory. The concept of the emotional dialectic allows for the possibility of challenges from an emergent consciousness grounded in social practices.

4. Some sense of the relationship between ideology and the economic (between 'base' and 'superstructure') is revealed in Williams' reference to *A contribution to a critique of Political Philosophy*, written in 1859, where Marx refers to people becoming conscious of the material transformation of the relations and forces of production through their ideological form. That is in legal, political, moral and philosophical terms. Williams says that in this sense, “ideological forms are expressions of (changes in) economic conditions of production” (1989, p.156).
5. Another sense, mentioned by Raymond Williams, is the distinction between ideology and science (1989, p.157). The ideology of the professional intellectual is useful in a discussion of cultural theory. Whether academic, or journalist, the professional ideology²¹ of intellectuals stakes a claim to some degree of objectivity and being based on 'facts'. This can be shown to be demonstrably 'false' in the case of journalists and severely compromised in the academy.

Hegemony and counter-hegemony

A proper analysis of the importance of these terms will come later; for now it is important to finish the working definitions with some comments on the Gramscian term 'hegemony' and 'counter-hegemony' (Gramsci 1971; Holub 1992). Hegemony has two elements:

- ?? the use of coercion by the “predominant economic group” through the institutions and the “state apparatuses of political society” in order to maintain its rule; and
- ?? the use of the “microstructures of the practices of everyday life” to produce (manufacture) the consent of the subordinate group (Holub 1992, p.6).

²¹ For further discussion of this point refer to chapters 4 and 7.

Importantly, this is not a fixed relationship; it is mutable through forces acting on the emotional dialectic. In a sense an emergent, or oppositional dialectic is 'counter-hegemonic' and can 'pull' ideologies in contradictory directions.

Andrew Milner rightly notes the importance of Gramsci's limited contribution to Marxism, and by his extension, to cultural theory as the reintroduction of dominance and subordination into a debate about culture and cultural production (Milner 1993, p.56). In a sense, Milner argues, this solves the base-superstructure problem in favour of what Raymond Williams called a dialectic ensemble (1983, p.110; Milner 1993, p, 56).

In *Keywords* Williams refers to the Gramscian concept of hegemony as both political domination and "a more general predominance... a particular way of seeing the world and human nature and relationships" (1989, p.145). An ideology becomes hegemonic when it gains a certain amount of general acceptance and when it is naturalised as the general emotional attitude of an epoch and alternatives are, for the most part, precluded. Counter-hegemony is introduced as a social force to be created by an 'emergent' (Williams 1980b) new class, or other cultural group, within the society in which an existing hegemonic elite holds sway.

It is here that Williams issues the challenge that hegemony and counter-hegemony shows the superiority of 'cultural materialism' over economically determinist Marxism (Milner 1993). Hegemony does this by including "cultural as well as political and economic factors in its analysis of social forces" (Williams 1989, p.145) and it is here that, for Raymond Williams and cultural theory, the formula *base-determines-superstructure* is refuted. The theoretical and methodological tool 'hegemony' is distinct from:

...the alternative idea of an economic base and a political and cultural superstructure, where as the base changes the superstructure is changed, with whatever degree of indirectness or delay. (Williams 1989, p.145)

Williams ends by suggesting that changes in culture can be a "decisive factor in radical change of any kind, including many kinds of change in the *base*" (1989,

p.146). Interestingly, Williams refers his reader to his notes on 'determinism' in his closing statement on hegemony.

Determinism

A number of issues in this thesis impinge on the question of 'determination' that is: Do aspects of one social relation have a determining effect on others? In other words: Can one type of social relation have more importance in determining the ensemble of emotional attitudes that constitute an ideology? Can, for instance, the economic relations of production determine in a fixed sense all other social relations? This is philosophically an important debate in media studies generally. It rages between those who reject any form of determination in social relations and accuse Marxists of being 'economic determinists' and others, like myself, who believe that many aspects of cultural studies and postmodern theory are predicated on their own forms of technological and cultural determinism. In short the pejorative 'determinism' or 'determinist' implies the *mistaken* privileging of one social relation over another. No one, it seems wants this accusation and insult hurled at them or their work. These issues are relevant to most chapters in this thesis, so some clarity is necessary.

The question to be posed here is: What is meant by 'determining'? If we reject the stodgy and brutal Stalinist version of 'economic determinism' what are we left with? Williams himself provides a neat answer, it is not the heavy hand of history or "wholly predictable events from known causes... inevitable but of a fundamentally external cause" (Williams 1989, p.100), but rather "setting limits, exerting pressures" (1980b, p.32). With this in mind, it is legitimate to argue that the Base (economic relations and forces of production) are determinant in the last instance – that is, they *exert limiting pressures* on all other institutions and practices (see chapter 2). It is in this sense that I argue that economic (class) relations determine the emotional dialectics of an epoch.

Thus at various 'moments' we see the relative autonomy, or strength, of competing social forces. As Milner (1993, p.61) notes, this rightly reintroduces the element of 'agency' (conscious activity by 'emergent' social forces) into Marxist theory, after the years of Stalinist wilderness. We are responsible for our thoughts, our actions, our history and our future.

*Men [sic] are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc - real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness can never by anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process. (Marx & Engels, *The German Ideology*, cited in Solomon 1979, p.35.)*

Some tentative conclusions

This introductory chapter has begun to develop the ideas and themes that inform this thesis. I have outlined why I believe grey collar journalists, such as Orwell, are public intellectuals in the Gramscian senses explained above. This chapter has outlined the grey collar thesis and alluded to the further exposition of individual threads of my argument. Importantly, this chapter has enumerated the grey collar methods employed to construct the thesis.

I have introduced the concepts of the emotional dialectic and the dialectic of the front-page as explanatory constructs that help to explain the dynamics of journalism as a production process and the fundamentals of the grey collar thesis. I have also suggested that these dialectics are ultimately driven (determined) by the prevailing relations of production and will further demonstrate the validity of this argument in the next two chapters. It is the emotional dialectic that allows us to better understand how the cultural commodity 'news' is structured and to examine the 'text' for its ideological 'meaning'.

At this stage I am proposing some tentative conclusions that will be further explored in the exposition of my thesis. In point form they can be summarised as:

?? In a broad sense news is a fairly uncontroversial commodity produced according to the rules of capital accumulation. Therefore news workers, including journalists, sub-editors, etc., are also workers in the Marxist sense of being labour organised to produce and circulate surplus value for the owners of the enterprise.

?? Journalism is a labour process that is defined by the generalised social relations of commodity production. By analysing the nature of journalism as 'work' and the contradictory class locations (Callinicos 1989b) occupied by

newswriters it is possible to develop a better critical understanding of how the emotional attitudes of newswriters are formed and of the politics of journalism.

?? By the 'politics of journalism' I mean the role of newswriters in the construction and dissemination of ideas in the public arena. I have suggested that, in this sense, journalists are 'public intellectuals' who help shape the emotional dialectic of their time and place and to popularise or naturalise what is actually contested interpretation of fact and history. This function of news reporting has both explicit and implicit ideological consequences for the process of social legitimisation, particularly the hegemonic discourse of the Nation-State (see chapter 4).

?? The emotional dialectics of newswriting are the product of the interplay of competing social forces. This allows us therefore, to characterise the role of journalist-as-intellectual in relation to hegemonic and counter-hegemonic dialectics of emotion.

?? The hegemonic emotional attitudes in journalism today are grounded in the dialectics and contradictions of the liberal-democratic 'free market' paradigm. However, this paradigm is under pressure at various times in its history from emergent cultural forms, such as the 'new journalism' of the 1960s and perhaps even more 'postmodern' forms of journalism today.

?? The major ideological functions of the media are to normalise and disguise the true class nature of capitalist social systems and averting or ameliorating the on-going crisis of 'legitimation' surrounding 'late capitalism'. *Grey Collar Journalism* argues that the ideological positions of newswriters are necessarily contradictory, thus they do not always play according to these 'rules' and can often be in opposition to the hegemonic social order. In other words, the dominant emotional dialectic is constantly under stress from emergent forms.

Finally I would like to suggest that recent theoretical 'developments' in the associated disciplines of media and cultural studies, in particular claims that contemporary societies are 'postmodern' and that there is a general phenomenon of 'postmodern journalism' (Hartley 1996; Lumby 1997, 1999) can be shown to

be both technologically and culturally determinist. Therefore, they are open to question from the grey collar perspective developed in this thesis.

Chapter 2

Raymond Williams: On Culture and Economy

For I think we cannot doubt that in sociology and in literary studies we are living through a paradox, and this presents itself to us in many different ways but most evidently as a problem of style. The basic form of the paradox is this: that we need theory, but that certain limits of its existence and consciousness prevent us from getting it, or at least making certain of it; and yet the need for theory keeps pressing on our minds and half persuading us to accept kinds of pseudo-theory which as a matter of fact not only fail to satisfy us but often encourage us to go on looking in the wrong place and in the wrong way. (Williams, 1980a, p.14)

This chapter further explores the duality of newswork as the production of both a commercial and cultural commodity. It also suggests that the debate within the Marxist tradition, as well as between Marxism and cultural studies over ‘theory’ and the materialist method, must solve the question of determination in favour of the economic (base) over the ideological (superstructure). Journalism has a dual relationship with capitalism and Capital - both economic and cultural. The grey collar thesis suggests that what I have described as the ‘dialectic of the front-page’ reflects the contradictions inherent in that duality. Further, I argue that the ‘flavour’ of this dialectic is primarily the result of economic forces - the social relations of news production.

Raymond Williams: The 'godfather' of cultural studies

As my former UWS colleague Richard Phillipps pointed out when I presented a paper claiming Raymond Williams as the 'godfather' of cultural studies at the 1997 Journalism Education Association conference, there are two possible readings. The ambiguity is deliberate and reflects what I think is Williams' ambivalent position between Marxism and cultural theory.

Raymond Williams is the godfather in the gentle sense of being the venerated benefactor of an extended family to whom one turns for spiritual advice. And he's a godfather in the Francis Ford Coppola sense - evil incarnate. It is a moniker applied with more than a little respect and humour. For me it signifies the ambivalent position that Raymond Williams occupies - on the cusp between the Marxist tradition and the newer discipline of Cultural Studies that eschews much of Marx's economic analysis in favour of a 'relatively autonomous' cultural sphere.

I acknowledge Williams' important influence on my own thinking, but like an unruly teenager; I am now rebelling against his paternalistic advice. In my eyes Raymond Williams abandoned the 'one true faith' when he rejected revolutionary Marxism in favour of an amelioratory and reformist politics that embraced the autonomy of cultural forms from economic relations. By this I mean Williams' insistence, especially in his later work, on the separation of cultural production from the system of capitalist commodity production. The first signs of this shift appear in his contribution to the 'Base and Superstructure' debate (Williams 1980b).

Theory & Pseudo-theory: Some Notes on Base and Superstructure

In a famous essay, *Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory*, Williams (1980b) argues against the rigid orthodoxies of the Stalinist left in which the concept of the economic base meant "a strong and limiting sense of basic industry," at the same time, he defended a more dialectical alternative:

...the specific activities of men [sic] in real social and economic relationships, containing fundamental contradictions and variations

and therefore always in a state of dynamic process. (Williams 1980b, p.34)

This is very much the position adopted in this thesis and it helps to position the relationships that determine what I am calling the emotional dialectic of journalism. Base and Superstructure are not architectural forms, or rigid categories, which Williams rightly argues would constitute a “dead end” if used as a framework for studying the “economics of modern cultural activity” (Williams 1980b, p.35). In the same vein, Williams argues that the concept of Superstructure must be “revalued” away from “a reflected, reproduced or specifically dependent content,” and towards “a related range of cultural practices” (1980b, p.34). For Williams, at this point in his life, and for the Marxist tradition in which I place myself, the argument about Base and Superstructure can be summarised in the famous aphorism, *being determines consciousness* (Williams 1980b, p.35). In this sense, according to Williams, to talk about Base is to talk about “the primary production of society itself...the material production and reproduction of real life” (1980b, p.35). This still leaves the question, then, of ‘What is the Superstructure?’

The hegemonic ‘process’

To answer this question Williams refers us to the Gramscian notion of “hegemony”; the laws, constitutions, theories, ideologies and social institutions that express and ratify the domination of a particular class (Williams 1980b, pp.36-37). However, this concept is then modified to allow for “variation and contradiction”, “alternatives and its processes of change” (Williams 1980b, p.38). The Superstructure, like the Base, is not a structure at all, but a set of processes for “social training”. Their purpose is the “continual making and remaking of an effective dominant culture”, but a dominant culture that can tolerate (within limits) “alternative meanings and values” which are at times incorporated, at others left alone (Williams 1980b, p.39). It is a central tenet of my thesis that the contradictions, gaps and tolerances are the very spaces in

ideology that grey collar journalists might choose to occupy²². These spaces are the operational results of the dialectic of the front-page.

We can see from this that there is no ‘Chinese Wall’ between Base and Superstructure: So why separate them at all? The important reason is to identify the source of value in Marxist economics at the level of *forces* and *relations* of production – which, in the capitalist economy, means the production of the commodity form and the reproduction of alienated labour. For Williams then, this allows, using his analogy, the piano *player*, as well as the piano *maker*, to be considered proletarian since they both, in their way, contribute to the creation and circulation of surplus value²³. They also, therefore, both contribute to the reproduction of the conditions of their own lives, within a capitalist system. Williams dismisses as ridiculous the idea that the piano-maker is ‘base’ and the piano-player ‘superstructure’ (Williams 1980b, p.35).

Journalism: A cultural commodity?

In Williams’ example, the piano-maker is clearly producing a commodity whose ‘use-value’²⁴ is that it can be played. The ‘use-value’ of the piano-player is the production of a less tangible cultural commodity, ‘meaning’. Newswork expresses both elements of this equation. It has a use-value in that it presents for consumption a product ‘news’, but this product is also ‘meaning’ - it is what John Hartley calls the “sense-making” function of journalism in modernity (1996, p.32).

If so, where does that place journalism and newswork in relation to a refined Base and Superstructure model? In another essay in *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, Williams (1980c) makes it clear he includes journalism and media

²² The political notion of Grey Collar is examined in Chapter 4: *The ties that bind*.

²³ This raises the question for Williams of whether the piano-player is a ‘productive’ or ‘unproductive’ worker in the Marxist sense. The same question must be asked of journalism. These issues are discussed in chapter 3, *Hard Yakka*.

²⁴ “...the utility of a thing is not determined simply by its material character, but by the flexible relationship between human desire and material properties. The ‘utility of a thing’ makes it a use-value” (Kim 1994, p.1).

production as productive activities that contribute to the circulation of value in a capitalist economy:

As a matter of general theory it is useful to recognize that means of communication are themselves means of production...themselves always socially produced and reproduced...they are not only forms but means of production, since communication and its material means are intrinsic to all distinctively human forms of labour and social organization, thus constituting indispensable elements of both the productive forces and of the social relations of production.

(Williams 1980c, p.50)

Following this argument from Raymond Williams, this thesis examines the proposition that journalism can be seen as the production of a commodity, which is also cultural artefact ('news'). In this way the production of the news product can best be analysed, understood and critiqued as a dynamic process within a definable set of social and cultural, *as well as* fundamentally economic, relationships; that is by looking at newswork as a form of intellectual labour that is part of both Base (economics) and Superstructure (ideology). The relationship between these processes (economic, ideological, political, social and cultural) is best described as being in a constant state of dynamic change (a dialectical relationship) in which meaning is “continually being re-invented and struggled over” (Louw 2001, p.3). Therefore, the emotional dialectic of newswork reflects this dynamic and the competing pressures of both economic and ideological forces.

The unstable dialectic

As Chris Harman (1986) notes, the dialectic creates a holistic system, involving humanity in the creation of an inherently unstable economic and cultural edifice (society, or 'lived culture'). Harman says "there is a certain sense in which it is impossible to separate material production from the social relations it involves" (1986, p.19).

Contradictions within the Base, between the forces of production (our relationship with nature) and the relations of production (our relationships with each other), "find expression in arguments, organised disagreements and bitter

struggle between people" (Harman 1986, p.27). This is no more than a restatement of the line taken by Marx that in any class society - based on the unequal and private distribution of power and wealth - the specific form in which surplus value is extracted from labour determines both the economic and cultural relationship between rulers and ruled. In *Making History* Callinicos says "consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict between the social forces of production and the relations of production" (1987 p.172). It is in this sense that the emotional dialectic (and the dialectic of the front-page) can be situated in both Base and Superstructure, as well as in the conflict between them.

Callinicos defines Superstructure as the sum total of social institutions and relationships outside work and writes, "any non-economic phenomenon is part of the superstructure if that can be explained in terms of the economic structure" (Callinicos 1987, p.174). I understand this to mean that the Superstructure imposes limits on the changes that can take place in the relations of production. For example, in a liberal-democratic country like Australia the *class-based* organisations of the State and Civil Society act as a brake on the development of the forces of production.

However, having said that it is important to add a rider - there is no mechanical interpretation of economic determination. British socialist Lindsay German clarifies what is meant by determination of the Superstructure by the Base as:

an understanding that ideas [cultures] do not arise from nowhere, but are the product of real social relations between real human beings. The economic system or mode of production is both fundamental and gives rise to all sorts of institutions, ideas and cultural forms, which fit that system. (German, 1991, p.29)

From this position it is a relatively simple leap of logic to confirm that the prevailing relations of production determine the emotional dialectic of journalism.

Marxism? ...Naturally

Alex Callinicos describes the methodology of Marxism as "philosophical naturalism", which sees human beings as "continuous with the rest of nature".

Therefore social relationships are understandable through the shared methods of the physical and social sciences and "seeking to explain human thought, language and action as far as possible by setting them in their physical and social contexts" (Callinicos 1995, p.8).

In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels provide a brilliant and practical exposition of this position:

Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is sold melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.

The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie all over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere.

(Marx & Engels, 1965, pp.36- 37)

This passage is often quoted in part, but when read in full it elaborates the sense in which Marx and Engels would prefer us to use the notion of determination.

Determining who is determinist

To devise a credible Marxist theory of journalism, one must establish how the economic base (that is, economic factors) can play a determining role in an activity that clearly encompasses other important social, cultural and political factors. This is the core problem. (Oakham 2001, p.77-78)

Bob Franklin, like Mandy Oakham, recognises that the Base-Superstructure question has "significant implications" (Franklin 1997, p.38) for the cultural sphere in general and theories of journalism in particular that requires "engagement with that economic or commercial base" (Oakham 2001, p.78).

I agree that this is the case and argue in later chapters that the Cultural Studies movement does not adequately address this issue. For example, John Hartley (1996), directly addresses journalism as a form of cultural production, but does not 'engage' with the commerciality arguments in a very satisfying way. I argue that postmodernists, like Hartley, have made a fundamental error in theory by embracing the (mistaken) idea that forms of 'cultural production', such as journalism, are somehow beyond the constraints of the economic (Hartley 1996, p.237). Franklin also appears to limit the "significant implications" to issues of ownership and control when discussing the political economy perspective on the media (1997, pp.37-39)

Against this I posit the thesis that a grounded study of journalism must first come to terms with the 'social relations' of news production. Cultural studies would charge that my position is a form of rigid and outdated Marxist orthodoxy, derisively known as *economic determinism*. Of course, I don't think so. As Oakham argues, we should think of the "economic context" as "a perimeter fence with gaps" (2001, p.78).

Rather, I would suggest that it's writers like John Hartley who ultimately fall back on a 'cultural determinist' position that's as flawed as the Stalinist model of economic determinism they seek to criticise. Hartley's position is based on the false and misleading assumption that:

culture - the discursive, media, knowledge-producing and sense-making sphere of life - might itself determine such matters as class, conflict and the state. (Hartley 1996, p.237, emphasis added)

My aim is to show how the economic form (relations of production) does in fact *determine* (ie. sets limits to) the cultural production of media artefacts. The grey collar thesis tests the idea that the relations of production determine the form of the emotional dialectic and that this can be seen in the day-to-day dynamics of the news we read, listen to and watch. Oakham suggests a methodology that allows for considering the ways in which political and/or cultural factors "appear to overrule the economic context as the key determinant" in some instances (2001, p.79). She then cites an example in which a senior politician is able to get a story about his personal life pulled from the newspaper in his state:

Was the news organisation allowing political considerations to overrule its economic imperative; that is, to produce stories that would sell? (Oakham 2001, p.79)

In a sense this is the wrong question and this is reflected in Oakham's conclusion that the "distinction drawn here is between genuine public interest and mere public curiosity" (2001, p.79). While this draws our attention to the correct proposition that editorial power is a property right (ie. a right endowed through ownership) it does not extend this to the logical next stage of analysis, the consideration of a generalised property right that extends to the whole ruling class, including the Victorian politician in question. In the example Oakham uses here it is very clearly the property (*economic*) right of Capital as a social relationship that led to the political pressure being brought against the editor in the first place. Thus the political pressure *was in fact determined by the economic relationship*, not at the individual, but at the social level.

Come on Raymond, step up to the microphone

A theoretical emphasis on the means of communication as means of production, within a complex of general social-productive forces, should allow and encourage new approaches to the history of the means of communication themselves. (Williams 1980c, p.53)

It is Raymond Williams, especially from about 1977 onwards, who provides many postmodernists with their theoretical armour against Marx. The link can be traced through a number of Williams' positions; the development of 'cultural materialism'; a confusion between competing definitions of 'culture' (see *Keywords* 1989, pp.87-93); and his initial support for, and later abandonment of, a 'determining' role for relations of production. I suggest that once the concept of last instance determination, by relations of production, is removed and 'cultural production' becomes co-determinant within the social formation; the relevance of class, to both politics and theory is lessened.

The theoretical 'novelty' of postmodernism

Postmodernism, in its "playfulness" (McRobbie 1994, p.3), abandons a fundamental principle of Marxism; that history is driven by class struggle and therefore the 'world historic' role of the conscious proletariat lies in emancipating

labour from the commodity form and property relations, once and forever. The key to this postmodernist dilemma may well be in their very hands, but hidden from their view. Andrew Milner puts it very well when he writes that postmodernism only exists within, "the very conditions of its theoretical novelty" (Milner 1993, p.69).

I want to begin outlining and elaborating the argument for a Marxist model of journalism as work, by briefly discussing the origins of postmodernism as a theorised explanation for ongoing and fundamental crises in contemporary capitalism. Like all theory it can never replicate the real and therefore remains partial. Other chapters of my thesis will deal with this issue more carefully, but in outline my premise is that the end of the Cold War (commonly signified by the destruction of the Berlin Wall in November 1989) has left all the old ideological certainties in ruins. Postmodernism is an intellectually defeatist and pessimistic response to this uncertainty. I think Raymond Williams sums it up nicely, he describes postmodernism in art and literature as "these debased forms of an anguished sense of human debasement" (Williams 1983)

British Marxist Lindsay German suggests that the postmodern phenomenon is no more than the artistic vision of a very modern society, "where the market is universal, where the system itself is conservative and resistant to change, where the basic needs of millions cannot be met despite technological advance." In such a climate, "artists are bound to reflect the fragmentation and atomisation of their society" (German 1991, p.41).

The techniques, so celebrated by postmodernism in art and literature; pastiche, montage, deconstruction, an "ironic and detached view of the world" (German 1991, p.40) are in fact integral to post-war modern art. So, in short, there's nothing really new in postmodern art forms. Further, I argue there has been no fundamental (revolutionary) break with modernism, which is the cultural form most closely aligned with commodity production and late 20th century capitalism. Having said that, I want to provide an introductory take on *postmodernism as theory*:

Angela McRobbie defines postmodernism as:

an aesthetic/cultural movement whose impetus derives from the break

it marks out with modernism and the avante-garde, and whose impact lies in its turning away from linearity and teleological progress towards pastiche, quotation, parody and pluralism of style, with postmodernity as a more general condition. (McRobbie 1994, p.24)

In this light, she suggests:

one of the questions that remains unasked, is precisely that of the status of the future of Marxism in the 1990s. (McRobbie 1994, p.25)

McRobbie argues that postmodernist theory has given its adherents the space and tools to explore the subtleties of Marxism. Her critique suggests that Marxism relies on a "form of economic reductionism in cultural theory". Of course, I disagree with this.

From cultural materialism to cultural studies

One of the earliest exponents of the postmodern position is Raymond Williams. Williams grappled with the Base/Superstructure model for most of his full and active life. Eventually rejecting a determining role for the Base (forces + relations of production) in favour of a more Althusserian position of co-determination between economy and culture.

By the mid 1980s, Williams had effectively separated 'culture' from the relations of production so that it became disembodied and autonomous. This led to his focus on artefacts and cultural production in and of itself.

Andrew Milner's *Cultural Materialism* (1993), first drew my attention to the crucial theoretical conflict over Base and Superstructure in Williams' work. At its heart is Williams and Milner's eventual rejection of a determining role for relations of production in the relationship between Base and Superstructure. Milner writes of "the central but false tenet of virtually all hitherto existing Marxist cultural theory, that of a determining base and a determined superstructure" (Milner 1993, p.69).

Milner's otherwise excellent appraisal of Raymond Williams agrees with his rejection of the "economic structures" of the Base determining "all other social

life" (Williams 1983, p.101). This central concept of Marxist thought is dismissed as one of the more:

...extreme positivist versions of a wholly or generally predictable process [that] have produced correspondingly reductive versions of the 'play of events' which are called...empiricism or pragmatism.
(Williams 1983, p.101)

However, as Milner notes, Williams was not against the Base and Superstructure proposition from the beginning. In *Problems in Materialism and Culture* - a series of essays published in 1980 - Williams summarises a version of the formula that allows for 'determination' by the Base, *as outlined above*.

In this case the Base is not merely economic; it covers the primary reproduction of society; the Superstructure is a whole range of cultural practices and determination occurs in the setting of limits, or the exertion of pressures by the base on the superstructure (the dialectic). But at the same time it signals, for Williams, a move away from the orthodox Marxist position of the determining role of the relations of production and towards a more abstract, literary 'cultural theory'.

In keeping with his subject, Milner relates his exposition to examples from Raymond Williams' many works of literary criticism: in particular, to his argument with the French structuralists (Milner 1993, p.65). The structuralists, Williams accuses, reduce the production of literary and other 'cultural' works to their moment of consumption (Milner 1993, p.66). However, both Williams and Milner themselves miss the connection of this reductionism to their own positions. In no sense can production be reduced to consumption; and one step further, without production there can be no consumption.

While correctly criticising the structuralists' notion of a "decentred author" (Williams 1989, p.198; Milner 1993, p.66) they adopt its postmodernist variation: the decentred 'cultural' individual, not 'workers' defined by their *class* relationship to the means of production. This manifests as a celebration of 'difference' and a denial of the 'commonality' engendered by global relations of production, the place where determination is crucially important. In his own review of Williams' work, Terry Eagleton (1989) defends the base-

determination-superstructure formulation against what he says is Williams' circularity, caused by allowing cultural production *equal* determinative force with the relations of production (Williams 1980, p.245; Eagleton 1989, pp.168-169).

Williams and Milner apply the term 'cultural materialism' to their theoretical break with Marxism on the question of Base and Superstructure. Milner indicates that for Williams this was a necessary response to already existing postmodern cultural forms, which were a by-product of advanced capitalism and a response to radical changes in the social relations of cultural process (Williams 1980, p.245; Milner 1993, p.67). In response I would ask: Are these changes really a radical departure from the normal process of capital accumulation and regeneration?

Williams argues that the commodification of cultural production reaches its apogee with the arrival of postmodernism; and that in this period art forms and popular entertainments become "debased forms of an anguished sense of human debasement" (Williams 1983, p.141). While I can agree with Williams up to this point, I disagree strongly with Milner's qualification that this phenomenon is "unamenable to analysis in terms of any base and superstructure metaphor" (Milner 1993, p.68). I argue that the general features of a 'postmodern' cultural landscape can be explained quite easily by reference to the political economy of Marx and the work of intellectuals who continue to promote his methods and explore his many insights. This, not postmodern dilettantism, is the real Marxist tradition.

Postmodernism and Classical Marxism

Feminists and black nationalists often complain that the concepts of Marxist class theory are "gender blind" and "race blind". This is indeed true. Agent's class position derives from their place in production relations, not their gender or supposed race. But of itself this does not provide grounds for rejecting Marxism, since its chief theoretical claim is precisely to explain power relations and forms of conflict such as those denoted by the terms nation', "gender" and "race" in terms of the forces and relations of production. (Callinicos

1987, p.177)

Callinicos is a strong supporter of attempts to 'totalise' Marxism, ie: to give it explanatory powers beyond the merely economic, I think he's right to do so. The grand-narrative is not dead, history is not over and class struggle is still the driving force in social relations.

Postmodernity or just a modern crisis?

In *The Postmodern Condition*, (1991) Frederick Jameson's arguments are along the lines that postmodernism is the logical cultural outcome of multinational capitalism, where social relations have been fragmented. His starting point is the twin crises of representation that bedevil late capitalism. These are: the crisis of economics, which manifests itself as declining rates of profit and the rising organic composition of capital; and the crisis of ideology. This latter crisis revolves around the de-legitimation of existing models of civil society and the state (what Habermas calls the public sphere, and Hartley the semiosphere) - both Stalinist and liberal-democratic - by the end of the Cold War.

The crisis of modernity, or if you like, the postmodern condition, must have some basis in empirical and observable data relating to the real world, "changes in practical reality" (Hinkson 1996, p.199). It is a fundamental proposition of the grey collar thesis that the evidence for such a break is, at best, weak. Hinkson asserts that to prove the postmodern condition we must be able to "speak of social relations in a new way" (1996, p.201). The "new way" that Hinkson proposes using to describe the postmodern world is to "conceive of social relations as working through technological mediation" (1996, p.201). But the *modern* communications 'revolution' is already more than two hundred years old!

Thompson in *The Media and Modernity* (1995) traces how the communication industries have played a crucial role in the development of modernity from the 14th Century, through to the era of globalisation from the late 19th Century to today:

While the origins of the globalization of communication can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century, this process is primarily a phenomenon of the twentieth...the flow of information and

communication on a global scale has become a regularized and pervasive feature of social life. (Thompson 1995, p.159)

This point is reinforced by Holub's analysis of Gramsci's work on literary criticism and aesthetics, *Antonio Gramsci: Beyond Marxism and Postmodernism*. In the following passage she is discussing Gramsci and the Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukács:

The life-world in which both thinkers are immersed, consciously or unconsciously, is structured by modernity...with the effects of technological modernization on the structure of the social, familial and, above all, cultural world. (Holub 1992, p.7)

I argue that this process of technological modernisation is no more than a process of change *within the social relations of production and consumption that define capitalism*. Hinkson attempts to turn this on its head and his argument rests on the technological revolution of the new information media, the "high-tech renovation of the work process" and the "making over of the social relations of everyday life, via the new mediums of communication":

It is these conceptual and practical reference points which must be our concern if we are to take hold of the processes of change which lead to the use of notions like postmodern society or postmodernism. (Hinkson 1996, p.202)

To a point Hinkson is right: if we are to feel comfortable claiming that modernity is finished we have to be able to back it up with evidence. Unfortunately, it is lacking in the piece referenced above, *The State of Postmodernity*. In opposition to Hinkson's 'it all happened yesterday' attitude, Renate Holub refers to Gramsci's understanding of the "gradual technologization and industrialization of culture" (1992, p.9). It is not something that has only happened in the past three decades and which is apparent only to those with a postmodernist theory up their sleeve. It is a process that continues *within and contributes to* the ongoing renovation of capitalist relations of production and is not antagonistic to these relationships.

Post-Fordism and the relations of production

Whether or not we are in an actually existing 'postmodern' world relies on how we answer the central question for Marxist social critics: What are the prevailing relations of production? There are a number of responses to this question; the postmodern relies in part on an interpretation of what's come to be known as post-Fordism²⁵, or a theory of post-industrial society. Tom Bramble has described the ideas of post-Fordism as “the rightward shift of social democracy in crisis” and a “rightwing offensive against Marxism” that attempts to “remove the debate from the wider surroundings of class society” (Bramble 1990, p.87).

The post-Fordist response to the crisis of legitimation is that industrial capitalism is over, this is the age of information capitalism. A number of consequences follow from this:

- ?? consumption, not production is determinant;
- ?? there's a multi-skilled core workforce of 'relatively' privileged white and male workers, the rest are peripheral and shade into the so-called 'underclass' at the bottom end; women and minorities especially miss out;
- ?? the state has been weakened by new methods of 'private' production and consumption and the internationalisation of capital;
- ?? cultural life has become more fragmented and pluralistic.

My thesis suggests that in order to sustain this argument, the theory of the postmodern must also argue that postmodernism is predicated on a break with the modern. That is with the production and social relations of commodity production. Postmodernists should be able to argue that the 'postmodern world' is founded on a fundamentally different production system to that of monopoly, or 'late' capitalism. I haven't got the space here to defend the whole idea, but I argue that postmodernism (if it is anything at all) is a deliberate intensification of commodity fetishism - via advertising and the commercialisation of 'popular reality' - that assists dysfunctional Capital to squeeze the last drops of profit from an almost fatal economic malaise.

²⁵ These arguments are addressed more fully in chapter 3, *Hard Yakka*.

The Marxist alternative to the postmodern explanation of delegitimation is, at the same time, a rebuttal of crude and vulgar economic determinism. Two most prominent exponents of this position are Chris Harman and Alex Callinicos. They are British socialists and writers who are virtually ignored by their contemporaries in Cultural Studies and postmodern theory. For example, Callinicos wrote *Against Postmodernism* in 1989, but I have not yet found one postmodernist who's read it; or who is prepared to tackle it in reply. His later work, *Theories and Narratives* (Callinicos 1995) takes this critique of postmodernism even further. I imagine it will be largely unread by the very group it is attacking.

In *Against Postmodernism*, Callinicos is sharply critical of the post-Fordist notions of 'de-industrialised' capitalism. He calls it "mind-numbing reductionism" which "grossly exaggerate[s] the extent of the changes involved [in capitalism] and fail[s] to theorise them properly" (1989, p.135).

There is no doubt a phenomenon of postmodernism at large in the world today, but it is not a fundamental break with capitalism. In my view it is a transitional cultural movement that represents attempts by Capital to renovate aspects of ideology and to maintain control over the contested emotional dialectic of our epoch:

Thus we have to recognize the alternative meanings and values, the alternative opinions and attitudes, even some alternative senses of the world, which can be accommodated and tolerated within a particular effective and dominant culture. (Williams 1980b, p.39)

Postmodernism is, for me, an emergent cultural form, firmly based on the prevailing relations of production. But it is a cultural form which fits Raymond Williams' definition of a "selective tradition", a useful set of ideological constructs which function as "modes of incorporation", allowing the hegemonic social class to engage in the "continual making and remaking of an effective dominant culture"(1980b, p.39)

What's this got to do with journalism theory?

...the mass media remake our cultural relations through the drawing of self-formative processes into a market calculus. What is crucial

here in the postmodern market is the way in which identity and cultural lifestyle are interwoven with technically mediated relations with a distinctive logic, one which significantly displaces cultural relations grounded more strongly in history and place. (Hinkson 1996, p.205)

It is a central argument of the grey collar thesis that no such displacement has occurred. I also demonstrate in the following chapter that the media is now and has been for at least 200 years an important structural element of the “market calculus”. As noted above, Raymond Williams decisively dealt with this issue in his important paper, *Means of Communication as Means of Production*:

This can be seen, very strikingly, within the totality of modern ‘economic’ and ‘industrial’ production, where, in the transport, printing and electronic industries ‘communicative production’ has reached a qualitatively different place in its relation to more strictly its proportion of production in general. Moreover, this outstanding development is still [in 1980] at a relatively early stage, and in electronics especially is certain to go very much further. (Williams 1980c, p.53)

Williams was absolutely right with this last point. The electronic miniaturisation of communications infrastructure has gone much further (Barr 2000), but it still operates within the epoch-forming social relations of production that mark the period of monopoly capitalism. The argument that this is somehow a “postmodern market” rests on Hinkson’s assumptions that “globalization and deregulation” are somehow outside the controls of the modern state which stands “helpless and unresponsive before such an unfamiliar force” (1996, p.205). In my view this is fundamentally absurd. It is precisely the modern Nation-State that is ultimately the bearer of these new social relations on behalf of monopoly Capital. It is my view (see chapter 4) that there is a crisis of legitimation facing the Nation-State, but so far it has proved itself to be remarkably resilient and does not (with isolated exceptions) seem close to any sort of epoch-defining collapse.

What does this mean for journalism theory and practice? Of course this is the \$64 question. We can begin looking for an answer in the work of John Hinkson

who wrote an interesting paper on the postmodern state and the “epochal changes” that are necessary to qualify a social system as postmodern (Hinkson 1996, p.197). Hinkson’s reference points (as mentioned above) include a “postmodern decentred self”, “notions such as the global village²⁶”, “the communications revolution and high-tech production” (1996, p.198). While very little evidence is presented to support many of these claims, it is Hinkson’s focus on the communications revolution that is of most interest and, by his own account, a key indicator of postmodernity. The focus in this section is on what Hinkson refers to as the “practices of academic institutions” that have launched “a new phase of extended practice” (1996, p.201). The arguments in Hinkson relate specifically to the privileging of academic workers, what he calls the “intellectually trained” (1996, p.206) and to the “technological mediation” of the communication process (p.202) which come together to form the “postmodern market” (p.204). This is, Hinkson argues, “a challenge to all prior forms of political economy” (p.204). However, I prefer to see the ‘information society’ as a logical extension of monopoly capitalism (Kim 1994).

While I have demonstrated in this chapter a profound disagreement with Hinkson’s formulations, I believe it is possible to apply his categories to newswriters and journalism in order to subject Hinkson’s position to a grey collar critique. My decision to do this is supported by Eric Louw who describes news production as a “sense-making” industry involving “hegemonic labour” in the “making, distributing and naturalizing meanings that serve the interest of the dominant group(s)” (Louw 2001, p.155). The people who do this work are “the intellectuals that make news, namely journalists” (Louw 2001, p.155).

*The proletarianised intellectual
- a grey collar academic?*

When Hinkson writes about a “brain-based” recovery in the ‘postmodern economy’ and the role of “intellectual technique” he is relabelling the materialist concept of intellectual labour - so-called ‘white collar’ workers, who occupy the

²⁶ McLuhan’s much-lauded ‘global village’ is a discredited concept and a product of technological determinism (see Jones 1998; Hirst 1998d).

contradictory class location that is commonly referred to as ‘middle class’, but in reality represents the non-manual working class which, according to Callinicos:

Embraces not only the mass of clerical workers, but also the majority of those in what are called the ‘lower professions’ - school-teachers, nurses, draughtsmen, lab technicians, social welfare workers.

(Callinicos 1989b, p.17)

I will demonstrate through the grey collar thesis (see chapter 3), that newswriters fit this category and so too, I would argue, do academic workers in universities²⁷. Joe Siracusa is not the first to lament this trend in higher education, universities getting “into the business of looking like a business” and becoming places where learning for its own sake is secondary to equipping students to become wage earners (Siracusa 2002, p.2). In elaborating his arguments for postmodernity today, Hinkson makes two unsupportable claims: that there has been a “major shift in the character of social strata” and that “the social structure is now framed by the intellectual culture” (1996, p.206). According to Hinkson, it is the “intellectually-trained” who manage the system and mediate social relations:

[They] mediate between the owners of the means of production and those do not...that is, they do not produce forms of knowledge, but disseminate information or withhold information in the service of disciplining the body and the mind for the powers that be. (Holub 1992, pp.164-165)

The concept here in Hinkson is reminiscent of the Gramscian notion of the ‘traditional’ intellectual, those who service the ideological needs of the ruling

²⁷ The formula I have worked out to demonstrate this is quite simple. The labour of university teachers takes the raw material - EFTSU (Equivalent Full-time Student Units) - and produces a new commodity - ILU (Indentured Labour Units) - for the labour market. I would have to say that, following my grey collar thesis, they are unproductive labour in the Marxist sense, being paid out of circulating Capital. Though it could be demonstrated that the working class bears the cost of reproducing itself out of its wages (variable capital) in that fees and HECS are now the common funding mechanisms for a tertiary education.

class. With very little modification²⁸, it is possible to insert newswriters into Hinkson's schema as part of the "intellectually trained" strata that are "taking up positions of [relative] privilege" and who can modify the power of capital and lessen the significance of property relations:

Whether one speaks of the shifts in the occupational structure which give a place of prominence to certain groupings of the intellectually trained while the bottom falls out of other middle-range occupations and many are forced to the margins of society; or whether one speaks of the pathologies of the emergent modes of personal information which call into being intellectually trained forms of counselling and other advice: these are the strata which are privileged by the emergence of a society which is distinctly postmodern. (Hinkson 1996, p.206)

This formulation stands in direct opposition to the grey collar thesis and is relevant to the discussion of so-called postmodern journalism as theorised by John Hartley (1996). I have suggested that the relations of production that prevail in newswriting are those of monopoly capitalism. The changes that have taken place over the past 40 or so years have not significantly altered the fundamentals. Certainly, there is insufficient evidence to sustain the epochal change thesis that implies some sort of 'revolutionary' transition to the postmodern society.

Hinkson's argument rests on the fallacy that the technological mediation of social relations is something new and profound (1996, p.207). However, as Raymond Williams has demonstrated, this process was itself an integral factor in the renovation of capitalism more than 30 years ago:

The crucial phase of monopoly-capitalist development, including capitalist control of the advanced technologies of centralized amplification and recording, came also to include the intensive development of such machines as transistor radios and tape-

²⁸ It is important to remember that the grey collar thesis suggests that newswriters can be in Gramscian terms either 'traditional' (ie: working on behalf of the bourgeoisie), or 'organic' (working on behalf of the working class).

recorders, which were intended for ordinary channels of capitalist consumption, ut as machines involving only primary communicative skills gave limited facilities also for alternative speaking, listening and recording, and for some direct autonomous production.

(Williams 1980c, p.56)

It doesn't take much imagination to replace transistor radios and tape-recorders with personal computers, the Internet, DVDs and MPEG technologies. Nor does this technological mediation call into question "the more systematic efforts of intellectuals [including journalists] to provide the means of social integration" (Hinkson 1996, p.207). Hinkson argues that "new social integrative mechanisms have emerged" in the postmodern world, particularly "the age of the mass media" (1996, p.208). Further, in their postmodern condition, these emergent forms are "outside any substantial formal relation with the state" (Hinkson 1996, p.209). Again this appears to echo Raymond Williams, though in a distorted form. Williams reminds us that the modern state is, in fact, "alert" to any oppositional form "that can be seen as emergent":

It is an important fact about any particular society, how far it reaches into the whole range of human practices and experiences [culture] in an attempt at incorporation. (Williams 1980b, p.41)

I have suggested that the emotional dialectic is in play in this incorporation-opposition process that in terms of journalism manifests itself in the dialectic of the front-page. That is, there is a contradictory relationship developed between grey collar journalists and their subject matter, largely the result of the social relations under which they labour - the basics of class struggle between labour and Capital. Louw describes this relative autonomy of newswriters as the journalist's seeming ability to be "simultaneously agents of the powerful and autonomous beings" (Louw 2001, p.155). But Hinkson would turn this on its head in an effort to imagine the postmodern world into existence in the here-and-now:

...in postmodern settings we encounter new forms of contradiction, those which grow from the emergence of the intellectually trained into the foreground of postmodern social structure...cultural

contradictions, limitations which relate to a mode of cultural formation grounded in technological mediation. (Hinkson 1996, p.214)

In this schematic, according to Hinkson, the class struggle does not disappear entirely, but it is "drawn into and reshaped by a new setting which has other concerns in dominance" (Hinkson 1996, p.214). It is this point that eventually brings Hinkson completely undone when he talks of "postmodern modes of production" (1996, p.219). Like many theorists of the postmodern, when their creations become unsustainable they fall back onto a bastardised materialist analysis without ever acknowledging that this is the case. Hinkson attempts to completely 'do away with' the labour theory of value:

...the logic of automated production must become a reality in all spheres of the economy...The point is that postmodern forms of production are distinctive in their assumption that productivity is simply a function of minimizing the labour of the hand. (Hinkson 1996, pp.218-219)

It is at this point that Hinkson's technological determinism is confirmed: postmodern forms of production rely on technology as "a tsunami - a massive, inescapable wave waiting to sweep all in its path", reflecting a "belief that technological change drives social change" (Varley 2001, pp.237-238). Hinkson's logic of automated production denies entirely the human elements of the labour theory of value - without which there is no surplus value, no Capital and no proletariat.

As Callinicos argues, the belief that the working class has disappeared (a precondition of postmodernity?) is fallacious:

The expansion of white-collar work has involved, in the main, a shift in the structure of the working class, not its disappearance. (Callinicos 1989b, pp.50-51)

In the preceding discussion I have argued that newswriters could substitute quite adequately for Hinkson's category of intellectually trained. This has been done to establish that such a construction does not withstand the scrutiny applied from the perspective of the grey collar thesis. To swap the categories in this way

allowed me to interpret and discuss the postmodern contention that there has been some form of epochal change *away from modernity*. Hinkson has at least attempted to formulate a political economy of the postmodern condition, something that John Hartley does not do in asserting his thesis of postmodern journalism.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the importance of Raymond Williams in any intellectual debate about communications industries and those that work in them. I have specifically addressed the contradictory nature of Williams's contribution to the debate. On one side his strong defence of the Marxist tradition of political economy and social research; on the other, his slide into cultural determinism, particularly in his later works.

Through a detailed critique of John Hinkson's claims for the existence of postmodernity in 20th Century social formations, such as Australia, I have demonstrated the impotence of the cultural studies method when divorced from a thorough materialist analysis. I have related Hinkson's 'postmodern' economics to the discussion of grey collar journalists as intellectually trained workers and this provided a foundation for the discussion of claims for a postmodern journalism that takes place in chapter 10.

The construct of a postmodern practice in journalism must be adequately theorised if it is to stand up. In my opinion (Hirst 1998b) John Hartley has not provided adequate evidence for his claims. The theory of grey collar journalism can explain some of the instances that Hartley relies on, in particular *Vogue* magazine. Whatever the status of the reporters, stylists and editors who work on *Vogue*, it is obvious that they are thoroughly imbued with its *haute-bourgeois* ideology:

*Each weekday morning a group of suave and wrinkle-free women,
who call one another "dear" and "dahling" and can speak in italics
and curse in French, move into Manhattan's Graybar building,
elevate to the nineteenth floor, and then slip behind their desks at
Vogue-a magazine that has long been the supreme symbol of
sophistication for every American female who ever dreamed of being*

*frocked by Balenciaga, shod by Roger Vivier, coiffed by Kenneth, or
set free to swing from the Arc de Triomphe in maiden-form pink.*
(Talese 1986, p.151)

This chapter has argued that the Base-Superstructure question can be decisively answered in favour of a version of economic determinism that does not rely on vulgar and mechanistic formulations. It is determinant in the sense that it sets the limits to cultural forms. In particular, in relation to journalism the economic relations of production set the limits to the form and content of the emotional dialectic of an epoch. I have suggested that this dialectic reflects to duality of the news commodity - its economic and cultural forms - and that newswork is a form of intellectual labour that is amenable to a materialist analysis. The following chapter discusses the commodity form of journalism in its economic guise by articulating the argument that the social relations of production situate newswriters in a contradictory class location, which gives rise to the range of emotional attitudes expressed in the dialectic of the front-page.

Chapter 3

Hard Yakka: Towards a labour theory of journalism

Hard Yakka: Journalism Theory & Practice

hard - difficult to do or accomplish; troublesome

yakka - n. Colloq. work. Macquarie Dictionary

Definitions of news, journalism and journalists have remained fairly constant throughout the 20th Century, but now we are seeing some change in how newswork is defined and how news is theorised. Most of this has to do with the so-called information revolution (Hinkson 1996; Barr 2000).

In 1965, Graham Perkin, then the assistant editor of the *Age* newspaper wrote in a handbook for newswriters, *The Journalists' Craft*, that news “always begins with a set of facts” that “invariably happens of itself”. However, these facts can be said to be news:

...only when a reporter searches it out and communicates it to other people...News is what interests people. News is not only what interests reporters. (Perkin 1965, pp.56-57)

This is a definition that has stood the test of time pretty well. Though today it is perhaps more problematic and more contested than it was some 36 years ago. In particular, news today has more of an entertainment function than it did in the mid 1960s. What interests the public is not always information that is critical to the public interest:

News of a divorce between two well-known writers is not a matter that is in the public's interest, but it is surely of interest to the public.

(Randall 1996, p.21)

I am happy with these definitions, they are acceptable to most people and they are easy to understand. However, there is an argument to be had about what properly constitutes journalism and news today. In particular a trend towards what John Hartley calls “postmodern journalism”, a shift away from “the real world of politics and power, the stuff of proper journalism” and towards a media that is “textualized, privatized, suburbanized, feminized and sexualized” (Hartley 1996, pp.23-24).

The most popular journalist in the world, the most successful journalist in the world today is Oprah Winfrey, the biggest changes in television are towards reality television, and don't forget that Jerry Springer is a journalist. (Paul Sheehan, cited in O'Regan 2001b, p.10)

This is a frightening thought, but it might be true. It's a logical extension of John Hartley's postmodern public sphere of news, journalism, politics and information, blended with celebrity and entertainment.

The grey collar thesis revolves around the proposition that what might be described as *proper journalism* is still about the daily reporting of events that are of interest to the public: in short, the world of politics and power. On the other hand what John Hartley celebrates as *postmodern journalism* is no more than a celebration of tabloid²⁹ news values and a distraction - the circuses that will keep the masses entertained and pacified.³⁰

The economic fundamentals

This chapter examines the economic foundations of journalism in the modern world by developing a 'labour theory of journalism' that is a theory of journalism as a set of social practices that can be understood as 'work' and that lends itself to a political economy analysis of the social relations that bind that 'work' to the

²⁹ The term *tabloid* has come to be a derogatory term for soft news or the use of outrageous, inflammatory headlines and story angles. It originally only referred to the size of a newspaper page to distinguish it from broadsheet.

³⁰ This debate is taken up in chapter 8: *Killing me softly*.

capitalist mode of production. These are not issues that John Hartley is comfortable with, preferring instead to concentrate on a 'textual' analysis that sits outside the social relations of its conception.

In particular, this chapter argues - following the previous discussion of Base-Superstructure - that it is the economic relationships that entwine journalism, which ultimately determine the form and content of the news. In other words, the prevailing relations of production determine the emotional dialectic, Orwell's emotional attitudes and ultimately what does or does not appear on the front-page of the morning papers.

Journalism can be an exciting and uplifting career choice, but it can also be difficult and troublesome:

Journalism is a hard life. It can be exciting, but it can sometimes be boring. It can be frustrating too. It can be demanding and so make it difficult or impossible for you to do a lot of things that other people do in their spare time. It can separate you from your family for a great amount of your time; some journalists see their school-going children only at weekends. It can cut you off from a good deal of social life with your friends, and it can make it almost impossible for you to know when you will be free and what time you will have to call your own. (Crosland 1965, p.39)

This view of journalism was presented to aspiring newswriters in 1965 by the then General Secretary of the Australian Journalists' Association, S. P. Crosland. Not a very enticing introduction to the career of journalism!

Journalism is hard work - *hard yakka* - so too is developing a theory to explain what journalism is. The grey collar thesis suggests that journalism theory, like the very practices it describes, must also be based on an understanding of its production relations. This chapter articulates this view from the starting point of Marx's labour theory of value as developed in *Capital* and as updated, developed and modified by theorists in the Marxist tradition.

Newswork and the labour theory of value

Briefly, the labour theory of value implies the social *comparability* of all labour (Marx, 1975, p.34); the *averaging* of the social cost of labour and the quantity involved in the production of a given commodity (pp.37–42) and the *extraction* of surplus value once production costs have been deducted from the price of the commodity (pp.53–54). In order to apply these theoretical positions to a study of journalism *as a labour process*, it is first necessary to discuss the Marxist ideas of labour *as the source of all value* and the concept of surplus value (that is the value of labour accrued by Capital as profit).

The labour theory of value

The labour theory of value is expounded at great length in Volume 1 of *Capital* and it is a general theory in that it applies to all forms of work and does not rely on the actual content of the work, or of the commodities produced (their *use-value*):

If we leave aside the determinate quality of productive activity, and therefore the useful character of the labour, what remains is its quality of being an expenditure of human labour–power...the value of a commodity represents human labour pure and simple, the expenditure of human labour in general. (Marx 1976, p.134–135)

According to this theory, it is the generalised nature of labour in a capitalist society that unites all workers and cements their class location. Marx called this the “general value–form” and wrote, “mere congealed quantities of undifferentiated human labour [are] the social expression of the world of commodities” (1976, p.160). From this foundation, Marx argues, labour assumes its social form “as soon as men start to work for each other in any way” (1976, p.164). In a capitalist economy this social form of labour is embodied in the producer’s relationship to the product (commodity) and this is the determining factor in establishing “a social relation between the products of labour” – the *exchange value* of commodities (1976, p.164). This relationship also establishes a social connection between people – a social relationship to commodities, to the means of production (Capital) and to the production process itself and to a common class of people who share this relationship. In its simplest form this is

the antagonistic relationship between two classes – the bourgeoisie and the proletariat – which appears only through the “exchange of the products of their labour”, an act of exchange mediated through the commodity (1976, p.165). Thus, the social relationships of the producers to the means of production – a class relationship – “do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as material relations between persons and social relations between things” (Marx 1976, p.165).

I believe that this exposition goes a long way to explaining the gap between class location and class-consciousness. The mediation of the commodity gives rise to the ideological relationship that disguises the true (class) nature of the relations of production in a dialectic flux of conflicting emotional attitudes:

The private producer's brain reflects this twofold social character of his labour only in forms which appear in practical intercourse, in the exchange of products... Value, therefore, does not have its description branded on its forehead; it rather transforms every product of labour into a social hieroglyphic...[Human] movement within society has for [workers] the form of a movement made by things, and these things, far from being under their control, in fact control them. (Marx 1976, pp.167–168)

In *Capital*, Marx is very clear that labour, “is, first of all, a process between man [sic] and nature...in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs...and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature” (1976, p.283). This is the form in which the economic - the relations of production at the Base of the society - creates in the “private producer’s brain” the emotional attitudes and dialectic of an epoch, both hegemonic and emergent.

This interaction between humans and nature produces value, but it does not occur in a social vacuum. The historical studies of Marx and his close collaborator Frederick Engels show in practice how man’s labour “simultaneously changes his own nature”(Marx 1976, p.292). Such events occur in the epoch-changing social revolutions that embody ‘progress’ from primitive hunter-gatherer societies, through the slavery of ancient Greece and Rome, to Feudalism, then the transition to Capitalism and, ultimately to a Socialist society. In *Capital*,

Marx is concerned with the general theory of labour and also its application in a Capitalist Mode of Production where:

From the instant [the worker] steps into the workshop, the use-value of his labour power and therefore also its use, which is labour, belongs to the capitalist. From [the capitalist's] point of view, the labour process is nothing more than the consumption of the commodity purchased, ie. of labour power... (Marx 1976, p.292)

In order for Capital to realise its purpose (to increase its value) the value of commodities produced by expenditure of labour by the worker must be worth more than what it costs to reproduce the worker's ability to expend even more labour power. The production of commodities, for the purpose of extracting surplus value is, for the capitalist a matter of bringing together the means of production (plant, equipment and raw materials) and labour power. These two components Marx called *constant* and *variable* capital. The value of the constant capital is used up and transferred to the new commodity (Marx 1976, p.314), through consumption of the means of production. Additional (surplus) value can only be added to the product by the worker's expenditure of labour power - the *using up* of variable capital, "no matter what the specific content, purpose and technical character of that labour may be" (Marx 1976, p.307). According to Marx's general theory, "[b]y the simple addition of a certain quantity of labour [*variable capital*], new value is added, and by the quality of this added labour, the original values of the means of production [*constant capital*] are preserved in the product" (1976, p.309). This added value is 'surplus' only because it meets the following conditions:

- a) greater than the average cost of the reproduction of the worker's capacity to labour, and
- b) appropriated by the capitalist by virtue of the social control over the production process that is gained from ownership of the means of production.

The property right of Capital is culturally and systematically entrenched through the superstructural legal system that is in a dialectical relationship with the economic (where determination is the 'setting of limits'). In this sense, from the point of view of Capital, the emotional dialectic takes a property form. It creates

a hegemonic 'privilege' which helps to legitimate and 'naturalise' an antagonistic class relationship of ownership and social control.

Accumulation and surplus

Marx expressed the accumulation process in a simple formula: $C=c+v$, where C is the total amount of capital, c is *constant* and v is *variable*. Thus the additional (surplus) value generated by the production process is mathematically defined as, "the amount by which the value of the [new] product exceeds the value of its constituent elements" (Marx 1976, p.320). So, at the end of the productive cycle the formula for the newly created value can be expressed as: $C=c+v+s$, where s is the surplus value. At the end of each production cycle Capital has met its objective, to increase its own value.

The activity of labour-power, therefore, not only reproduces its own value, but also produces value over and above this. This surplus-value is the difference between the value of the product and the value of the elements consumed in the formation of the product, in other words [the value of] the means of production and the labour-power.
(Marx 1976, p.317)

Capital only increases its value by exploiting labour during the production and circulation cycles. That is, by extracting more value, than the total amount of wages paid for the social reproduction of labour power and the cost of fixed capital (the means of production). If the workers do not control the means of production they can only survive by selling the one commodity they do possess (their labour power) to Capital.

In proportion as the bourgeoisie, ie. capital, is developed, in the same proportion is the proletariat, the modern working class developed – a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. (Marx & Engels 1970, p.39)

According to the Marxist theory, in a market economy the ability of owners and managers to exercise social control over production varies in proportion to the relative economic, ideological and political strengths of opposing class interests - the emotional dialectic of an epoch as determined by the balance of class forces

prevailing. This suggests that, by its very nature, capitalism involves all workers in a struggle for social control over the production process and in Marx' view, the ultimate abolition of the wages system and private property in the form of Capital (1970, p.48–50). This is the historical moment of revolution when the emergent emotional dialectic of the proletariat becomes strong enough to challenge and destroy the hegemonic social relations of Capital.

The labour theory of value grounds Marx's theories of the relations of production and the class divisions that flow from it, notably the idea that there is a constant struggle to impose limits on the owners' control over the production process.

The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, are its own gravediggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable [if a little slow in coming]. (Marx & Engels 1970, p.46) [Comment by MH]

Clash of the dialectics

The force of the Marxist argument is that the capitalist methods of producing wealth clash with the emerging emotional dialectic of the working class as a whole:

as the forces of production develop they clash with the pre-existing social relations and ideas that grew up on the basis of the old forces of production. (Harman 1993, p.24)

It is the balance of class forces that determines the outcome of this clash. If proletarian consciousness is high and the working class has confidence it can overthrow the old system. If the forces of reaction are stronger, the revolution will not succeed. *Nor will it necessarily be televised!*

The labour theory of value grounds the emotional dialectic in class divisions and in the relations of production: it is the cornerstone of any argument about economic determination of class location and class-consciousness. It is the organisation of production - the division of labour and social control - which determines (set limits to) the development of the emotional dialectic. Revolution is the process of breaking this bond and establishing new collective relations of

production. The grey collar thesis argues that newswriters are just as caught up in this process as any other worker.

Do journalists produce Surplus Value?

The newsroom managers did not apologize for doing what they believed was absolutely necessary. "Our job is to sell eyeballs," one executive producer told me. "And without them, we're out of business." (Ehrlich 1997, p.308)

Ehrlich interprets this executive's "eyeball" comment to mean "ie. deliver audiences to advertisers" (1997, p.308). In a nutshell to deliver a profit on their news broadcast.

The media *production process* has an unusual relationship with its *market*. It is not a simple matter of putting 'ideas' into the public 'market' so that price can be determined by 'supply and demand'. News is clearly a commodity - newspapers are sold, magazines have a cover price, the electronic media is increasingly looking to narrow-cast marketing to realise a profit - but the real commodity that the media 'sells' is its audience, the real customer is the advertiser (McQueen 1977; Windschuttle 1988; Ehrlich 1997).

Refining a political economy of newswork

...the economics of the media put them primarily in the business of selling audiences to advertisers. The news and entertainment content of the various media serve the purpose of attracting audiences in predictable numbers with predictable specifications. (Windschuttle 1988, p.6)

Windschuttle's is a fairly straightforward political economy approach to the advertising-media nexus, but is it so simple? The common view - advertisers buy an audience's watching time - is challenged by Joohan Kim who suggests that the formula for the exchange of value through the producer-advertiser-consumer transaction is much more complex because "communication labour" produces "surplus- value by producing demand power" (Kim 1994, p.7).

In my view, Kim's analysis is not so much a refutation of Windschuttle and the political economy approach, but an important refinement. Kim's notion of

“demand power” is not that far removed from the ‘audience-as-commodity’ view. Where Kim’s approach varies and improves this idea is in the twinned concepts of “communication constant capital” (CCC) and “communication variable capital” (CVC) (Kim 1994, pp.7-8). Kim’s paper is discussing the advertising industry and its relationship with the electronic media (in particular television) and he argues that “communication-labour” is productive (ie: produces surplus value) and an “essential part of the whole economic system” (Kim 1994, p.7). This is, according to Kim, an important diversification of Marx’s general theory and, for me, an interesting comment on some media theory that situates the institutions of the mass media as a ‘consciousness industry’:

As products became commodities in capitalist society, human communication activities became communication-labor. With the perspective of communication-labor, we may extricate ourselves from the dualism of the economy and the ideology, or of matter and ideas, or object and subject. My claim is that the institutions of mass communication do not only “affect” the economic process. They themselves are the essential part of the whole economic system. There is no “consciousness industry” which is to be distinguished from the general industries...In a capitalist society, every industry produces commodities and values; at the same time, no economic process can be achieved without human communications. (Kim 1994, p.7)

There is, in my view, a duality to the news commodity - it is a ‘thing’ and a ‘value’ - so in a sense we are not able to “extricate” newswork from the “dualism of economy and ideology”. However, this is a minor criticism of Kim’s position outlined above. In general I think his interpretation of Marx supports the grey collar thesis - newswork is (at its core) part of the “general industries” that typify the capitalist mode of production. Kim argues that communication-labour engaged in advertising is productive and that advertising “is not a problem of selling but of production” (1994, p.8). However, this view is not universal; for example, Poulantzas would argue that newswriters are not necessarily productive because, as members of the new middle class they do not add to the

total sum of surplus value (1975, p.211). For the grey collar thesis this suggests a number of questions to be answered here:

?? Can we apply this analysis to journalism?

?? Do newswriters produce surplus value?

?? What is the value of Poulantzas' argument about productive versus unproductive labour and its relationship to class?

?? Can the principles outlined by Marx, the labour theory of value and the inevitability of class struggle, be applied in this discussion of journalism?

Perhaps it's a moot question in light of the above, but in my view, the answer is 'Yes', *if* we examine journalism as a labour process. We might (for example) expect journalists to exhibit characteristics similar to those of other wage labourers, in the on-going battle for social control in the newsroom. The important principle to consider at this juncture is the division of labour in a capitalist economy:

The growing differentiation of social strata and the formation of classes is a function of the development of the division of labour...a division articulated upon the labour process in the case of the capitalist system. (Palloix 1976, p.48)

The duality of the news commodity: A cultural dialectic?

Grey collar workers can be shown to be engaged in "intellectual" as opposed to "manual" labour (Palloix 1976, p.48). However, as Marx's general theories tell us, there is, in practice, very little distinction: it is in degree, rather than kind. The extraction of surplus value during the production of a newspaper, or a bulletin for commercial radio and television is clearly the product of intellectual labour (thinking and writing) engaging with the means of production (computers, etc), and the expenditure of manual labour (the printing or physical transmission). Though we might argue that it is perhaps not as simple as that outlined by Marx in *Capital*. There are a huge variety of attendant industries attached to the production and circulation of the news commodity: contractors, suppliers and clusters of small to medium enterprises that support the news industry.

Importantly this includes a number of public houses and other dining & wining establishments!

Does news have a 'use-value'?

The raw material that newswriters apply their labour power to is not car-parts, coal or iron ore, it is “potentially newsworthy materials”, “happenings in the everyday world” (Tuchman 1997, p.175). There is clearly a use-value expressed here: the circulation of information that is an element of public discussion. We can refer to this aspect of the news commodity as a cultural/ideological transaction that is the circulation of the emotional dialectic.

It might appear, at first glance that the labour of newswriters is removed from the accumulation of surplus value, because the majority of profit on the transaction is realised through the sale of the advertising space surrounding the news hole on the page, or the radio/TV bulletin³¹. However, that advertising space is not worth anything unless it reaches the mass audience – the “eyeballs”. Most of us would not sit down to watch an endless diet of commercials, nor would we buy a newspaper that contained only advertisements³², the space is only valuable because of what it is surrounded by. It is the news and other features that attract people to buy newspapers and the programming that determines the audience for television and radio advertisers. This is the second side of the news commodity dualism, its role in the circulation of surplus value and its allocation amongst various fractions of the bourgeoisie, what Marx describes as the ‘average’ rate of return for a ‘going concern’.

*Productive or unproductive?
That is the question*

There’s no doubt that most newswriters are part of the collective labour necessary for the continued reproduction of capitalist relations of production and governed by these relations. Collective labour is broadly defined as “anyone who

³¹ It is generally recognised that the print media is not commercially viable on cover (selling) price alone, neither is subscription (pay-per-view) television. Advertising revenues are at the heart of media profitability.

³² Yes, I know there are exceptions, such as the late night/early morning programs that are ‘home shopping’ and some people buy the *Trading Post* every week. But the point is a valid one.

[is] regularly compelled to sell their labour-power in order to live, even if they [are] not engaged in manual labour” (Callinicos 1983, p.193). But the question remains are editorial newswriters productive labour (Carchedi 1977, p.10) in the capitalist economy? That is, do they directly produce surplus value for the capitalist who employs them? Or, are they unproductive labour, involved only in the circulation of surplus value between capitalists?

For some Marxists, the question of whether or not the labour of an individual or group of workers is productive determines class membership. Guglielmo Carchedi, for example, argues that unproductive labour “does not produce surplus value and yet it is expropriated of surplus labour” (1977, p.9), which means that person “cannot be exploited”, but is “economically oppressed” (1977, p.10). This appears to be a very fine and semantic distinction, because as waged labour they would objectively (on the definition given above) seem to be members of the working class. Poulantzas places this unproductive group of workers (ie: those who do not contribute directly to the total sum of surplus value) in the new petty bourgeoisie; not in the working class. He cites as an example teachers, who “remain unproductive labour even if, ...they contribute towards the reproduction of labour-power” (Poulantzas 1975, p.213). This is one of the central questions addressed in this chapter: Are grey collar journalists members of the working class or are they ‘middle class’ with a tendency to be dragged towards either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat?

The French Marxist Christian Palloix reminds us that “all forms of surplus-product presuppose both a certain combination of elements of the labour process and their integration in to the productive system and the movement of capital” (1976, p.46). Palloix’s insights are appropriate in the discussion of journalism as work, as the news production process can be described as an “intensive” form of surplus extraction, “characterised by increases in the productivity of labour [in] any labour process founded upon the principle of automation” (1976, p.46). It is clear from Marx’s general theories that any worker involved in producing commodities, including those who transport them, are productive workers (Callinicos 1983, p.194). However, when we consider newspapers and free-to-air broadcasting, it is clear that these are not necessarily profitable *in their own right*. Without advertising revenues, they would not realise a profit for their

owners. Profits in the media industry come from the ability of proprietors to attract *advertisers* (other capitalists) willing to pay for space to advertise *their* commodities to the consuming public. In a sense the media's role is to bundle up for sale (commoditise) large slabs of their audience. Poulantzas would argue that this places newswriters in the sector of circulation rather than the production of surplus value; that is, wages in this sector are paid out of revenues (the circulation of surplus value between Capitals) rather than the directly produced surplus value (1975, p.212). This is also argued by Carchedi, "all labour employed in the circulation sphere, ie. in the formal transformation of money-capital into commodity-capital and vice-versa, is unproductive labour and thus is economically oppressed" (1977, -p.10). If we take the narrow definition of proletariat given by Poulantzas and Carchedi it would seem that editorial newswriters are not members of the working class as only those directly engaged in the creation of new surplus value are considered in this case. However, this is not entirely clear, Carchedi argues that the process of proletarianization – the degradation of middle class labour relations – affects large sections of the petty bourgeoisie. As Braverman (1974) notes this process affects the lower levels of this strata, like newswriters, teachers, nurses and public servants. Carchedi argues that this layer is "identifiable, on the level of production relations, as proletariat and which is petty bourgeoisie on political and ideological grounds...the proletarianization of this section of the petty bourgeoisie means it's returning to what it already is on the level of production relations" (1975, p.100). It is this process of change within the production relations of capitalism that drives editorial newswriters towards the contradictory class location of grey collar journalists:

The accumulation needs of capital also mean that there is a constant tendency for capital to decrease the area [of petty bourgeois labour] devoted to the performance of the global function of capital [supervision and control] and to increase the area devoted to the function of collective worker. (Carchedi 1977, p.101)

In a sense the work of reporters and editors on newspapers is both productive and unproductive labour in Marxist terms. That is, surplus value is realised on the expenditure of labour power by the reporting staff when the commodity is sold

for its cover price. However, the economics of the newspaper industry are such that this does not realise much (if any) of a profit. The real value comes from advertising revenues. However, this circulation of expropriated value would not be profitable for the media owners unless they can employ the labour necessary to produce this commodity (audience) for sale to advertisers. This is why I don't think Kim's critique of this position is really necessary: there is no essential difference between the 'audience-commodity' perspective and Kim's "demand power". It is a semantic point with little theoretical relevance, advertising (Kim's productive communication-labour) provides a "series of codes for consumption", ie. they create demand (Kim 1994, p.9). Newswriters participate in this process because they provide not only "codes" for the consumption of the information commodity 'news', they actually make the advertising content of the medium palatable for the consumer.

Callinicos refers to Marx's exposition of the role of *commercial capital* from volume 3 of *Capital* (Marx 1981, pp.379-393), which, in the context of this discussion, helps to explain how the media operates as a fraction of circulation capital.

***Capital Media:
Packaging the emotional dialectic***

Commercial capital thus creates neither value nor surplus-value, at least not directly...it can help the industrial capitalist to increase the surplus-value he produces...its functioning promotes the productivity of industrial capital and its accumulation...it increases the ratio of surplus-value to capital advanced, ie. the rate of profit...it increases the portion of capital directly applied in production". (Marx 1981, pp.392-393, emphasis added)

A simple definition of media capital can be easily summarised in the context of the media's role (via advertising) in the realisation and circulation of profits. Investment in the media, part of the larger pool of circulation capital, is "nothing but the transformed form of a portion of this circulation capital which is always to be found on the market" (Marx 1981, pp.392-393). Or, as interpreted by Alex Callinicos, like the merchants, the media moguls take "a share of the total surplus-value through their role in the circulation of commodities" (1983, p.194).

Palmer (1988) has made a similar point about the labour of telecommunications workers:

Theoretically, telecommunications are part of what Marx called the ‘circulation process’ of capital, as opposed to the ‘valorisation process’, where surplus value is produced. (Palmer 1988, p.155³³)

Like other capitalists, media bosses pay for the labour-power they employ only *the average social cost* of reproducing that labour, in all cases this is less than the value (to their employer) of the service they perform (Callinicos 1983, p.194). Such a situation would not be possible without the general rise in the productivity of labour brought about by the industrial revolution and continuing changes in the organisation and technology of work. Throughout the capitalist world, according to a Marxist analysis, the enormous rise in labour productivity has increased living standards “in absolute terms”, while the proportion of total wealth shared by the working class has actually fallen (Callinicos 1983, p.196). It is no coincidence then; that the commercial mass media we know today can only flourish in a modern capitalist society.

Without going into complex mathematical formulae, it follows from Marx’ general theory (and Palloix’s extrapolations) that the labour of journalists (and other grey collar workers) *is* socially comparable to that of workers in the Ford car plant. The total cost of employing journalists to write the copy (directly or indirectly), the labour of the printers, the cost of machinery and the cost of paper, must be less than the total income generated by sales and advertising revenue in order for a profit to be realised. Therefore, media capital extracts surplus value from the labour it employs. Most journalists are, if the assumptions of this model hold true, occupying proletarian class locations (or the contradictory lower levels of the new middle class), even if they are not strictly within the Marxist definition of productive labour. Of course, there are exceptions; such as highly-paid columnists, whose role is similar to that of what Callinicos describes as the ‘service class’. Those “whose job is to administer the highly complex economy

³³ There are references to Palmer’s doctoral thesis in his 1988 essay, which I have not read, but which contains an exposition on “the extension of labour process theory to the sphere of circulation and the State” (cited in Palmer 1988, p.155).

of advanced capitalism, and whose income and power over fellow employees make them a group separate and alienated from the working class (1983, p.195). This small group aside, the vast bulk of reporters and sub-editors working in the media are wage-earners employed by large industrial concerns that expect to make a profit from their labour. Thus it is possible to argue against Poulantzas on this point. He would put newswriters into the category of “service providers” who do not belong to the working class (1975, p.214). In opposition to this is the position adopted in this thesis: namely that the social relation of alienation and exploitation (or, if you like Carchedi’s *economic oppression*) constitutes an economic relation to Capital that would place most reporters and sub-editors in the working class.

The Fact Factory: The changing nature of the reporter’s work

Since World War 1 a major change of emphasis in newspapers has considerably affected the roles of the editor and the journalist... This has been the increasing preponderance of revenue from advertising... this change has tended – especially since the thirties – to exalt the role and function of management... This is damaging to journalists generally because anything that belittles the function and control of the editor inevitably damages the journalists who work for him [sic]. Almost invariably, it soon comes to damage the paper.
(Rivett 1965, p.26)

Rivett dates the changes he’s describing from the 1930s, firmly in the epoch of modernity. That is at a time when the emotional dialectic of modernism was already in play creating grey collar journalism as both an economic category of labour and as an emotional attitude, which, as noted in chapter 1, is typified by someone like George Orwell. At the end of the 20th Century the media looks, feels, smells and tastes a lot different to the way it did one hundred years ago, or even 35 years ago (Carey 1993; Schultz 1994; Guerke & Hirst 1996; Schultz 1998). This might lead to the suggestion that the emotional dialectic is somehow altered, perhaps towards Hartley’s postmodern journalism. However, one thing has remained constant; the media is an industry and an important element of the global economy, much as it has been for most of the past 100 years:

More and more the owner of the big daily is a businessman who finds it hard to see why he should run his property on different lines from the hotel proprietor, the vaudeville manager, or the owner of an amusement park. (Ross 1910)

This line from Ross is very apt: today's news media is in the entertainment business. Despite these changes in style and content it's still big business, "essentially a moneymaking scheme, dependent on one hand upon its popularity with the public, on the other hand upon the money market" (Rogers, cited in Salcetti 1995, p.54). As the new millennium dawns, the giants of the global communications industry, News Corp, Reuters, AOL/Time-Warner and CNN, are at the forefront of economic, cultural and political globalisation (Carey 1993; Alleyne, 1997; Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen 1998). Using the tools of historical materialism and a dialectic approach, this chapter examines the ways in which new technologies are adapted into the news production process and how the changing economics of the news media continually alter the social relations of news production and impact upon ways in which journalists work. The arguments developed here will show how the systems and organisation of newswork created and sustain journalists as members of the working class, with the qualification that they are grey collar, not blue collar. The grey collar thesis proposes that newsworkers share elements of the emotional attitudes of the working class - that is, it is a contradictory consciousness of class.

Newswork as intellectual labour

Poulantzas' arguments appear confusing at another level – that of the distinction between manual and mental labour. The generalisation of commodity production in monopoly capitalism means that created works (works of imagination and intellect) will necessarily take a commodity form (including the alienation this engenders), "even though what is involved are services exchanged against revenue" (Poulantzas 1975, p.219). Therefore my grey collar - blue collar distinction is necessary, I argue, because of the intellectual, rather than manual, nature of the news production process. The commodity relationship is a determining economic relationship between newsworkers and media capital, though it is certainly overlaid with ideological and political elements. The very commodity at the heart of the news production process - the individual news

‘item’ - has, as we’ve seen from the previous discussion - has a dual nature. This duality therefore demands of the newsworker an intellectual and emotional engagement that distinguishes the news commodity from the proverbial ‘widget’. As discussed in later chapters, the thinking process of newswork creates opportunities for reporters to occasionally bypass the conditions of social control imposed by the social relations of production (Breed 1997, p.117). There is, in fact an occupational consciousness formed in the newsroom based on the degree that journalists and reporters can exercise a limited form of autonomy measured by “the degree to which it is capable of increasing its political power [vis-à-vis Capital] and its material rewards (Krause 1971, p.85). Importantly for the grey collar thesis, Krause notes that the formation of occupational consciousness is inhibited by the division of labour and is thus not capable of being generalised into a class consciousness in the Marxist sense (1971, pp.86-87). This limited freedom is bolstered by the ideology of professionalism that regulates reporters’ behaviour and establishes the “norms and standards” expected of them within a reward system that values conformity (Soloski 1997, p.142). However, I have some disagreements with Soloski and the American functionalist school he represents. This theoretical discourse adopts what I consider an overly organizational approach to the sociology of journalism. David Harris describes the American school as “especially behaviouristic and functionalist” (1992, p.113). Nor do I support Schudson’s critique of political economy that would concede “power of Orwellian proportion to the capitalist class” (1997, p.12). Further, I reject Ehrlich’s insistence on some sort of benign “Competitive Ethos” (1997, p.303). This chapter relies, instead, on adapting a clearly Marxist perspective to the problem of newswork and newsworkers, starting with a general examination of the dual commodity form of journalism and newswork as a form of wage-labour. My analysis proceeds from the premise that “Capital is therefore not a personal, it is a social power” (Marx & Engels 1970, p.51). It is the precise nature (historicity) of this relationship, I argue, that ultimately determines how journalists behave ‘on-the-job’.

The social power of Capital expresses itself in many ways both inside and outside the newsroom. In this chapter we are concerned to examine the extent of this power to define and control the physical and intellectual process of news

production *inside* the newsroom. Not only has the physical layout of the newsroom been modified to accommodate computing and electronic newsgathering hardware, the structure of work and the social control of newswriters' activities have also altered to fit the needs of the 20th Century news marketplace. While it's a commonplace that change is the only constant, in terms of this thesis, the important changes of note are those that have occurred in the post-war period since the late 1940s. American journalist, Gay Talese noted that even that most staid of newspaper institutions, *The New York Times*, was not immune from the social pressures of the 1960s. It was, he thought at the time, changing in ways that constituted a "startling revelation to many readers" who had:

...probably imagined the interior of The Times to be closer to its prevailing image, a cathedral of quiet dignity, home of the Good Gray Lady, and perhaps years ago The Times was more like this. But now, in the Nineteen-sixties, it was not. (Talese 1969, p.5)

In Australia, the trends that Rohan Rivett lamented in 1965 (the privileged position of managers, etc.) are now firmly entrenched.

...the shift in company management strategies has widened even further the culture gap between the people who run the companies and the people who gather and edit the news. (Cunningham 1991, p7)

Newspaper profitability is falling as advertising revenues stagnate (Megalogenis 2001) and afternoon editions are a thing of the past (Dodd 2002, p.6). The capital costs of running a radio or television network are increasing; business managers now outrank editors and the pressure on the vast rank-and-file of journalists - to *yakka* even harder - is also mounting.

From city room to global news industry

Much of the old chaos of the old city room-the chatter of wire machines, aides running back and forth with copy, reporters banging away on typewriters-has been reduced to a computer hum. With the changes in the physical environment, today's newspaper editors have been encouraged by computerization to clean up their own mental

spaces and reorganize work-life around them. (Underwood 1993, p.73)

Though it may not seem so from Underwood's bleak description, the relatively modern institution of journalism as we know it had its beginnings in the radical pamphleteers of the French and American revolutions. Newsheets were circulated to inform an active citizenry and they struggled against the 'tax on knowledge' that many European governments imposed on the newsmagazines of the 17th and 18th centuries. As Collins wrote in her introduction to *The Government and the Newspaper Press in France 1814–1881* (1959): "Liberty of the press has long been one of the most cherished freedoms", a freedom those French citizens came to enjoy (within limits) after 1819:

The [French] press laws of 1819 settled for once and for all that newspapers were entitled to as much liberty as books, and that liberty could not be regarded as compatible with the use of censorship...but what about other forms of control which affected the production of newspapers – stamp duties, caution money, permits for the founding of newspapers, licences for printers and hawkers?
(Collins 1959, p.ix)

This monumental struggle for 'freedom of the press' is well documented, but in England and the new world, freedom from the newspaper tax was quickly replaced with a press beholden to the interests of the rich and powerful bourgeoisie that came to own it (Hollis 1970; Walker 1976; McQueen 1977; Bowman 1988; Engel 1996; Hartley 1996; Schultz 1998; Williams 1997).

As Kevin Williams points out, the history of journalism and the news media can only be fully appreciated if one takes into account "the countervailing pulls on the mass media" exercised by public opinion on one hand and "powerful institutions in society" on the other (Williams, K. 1997, p.5). Cryle's (1997) case study of status among journalists in colonial Australia and Cyril Pearl's excellent *Wild men of Sydney* (1977) are two examples of histories which factor this contradiction into their narrative accounts. As Cryle insists:

A distinctive challenge for the journalism historian is to steer a balanced course between the uncritical genre of journalistic

reminiscence, on one hand, and the wholesale dismissal of journalists, which appear in official accounts on the other. (Cryle 1997, p.176)

By the 1860s, as literacy levels began to increase during the industrial revolution, daily newspapers, which relied mostly on advertising revenue to survive (Williams, K. 1997, p.6), started to proliferate to meet the needs of a reading public (Hardt & Brennen 1995, p.vii). Prior to this change the newspaper's publisher was often also the writer, proof-reader, typesetter and printer, but the industrial revolution also saw the production of newspapers revolutionised – they became less the mouthpiece of individual and politically motivated proprietors and more industrial conglomerates. “The market did its job very well. Within twenty years radical newspapers had virtually disappeared” (Williams 1997, p.6).

As the process of physical change in the newsroom gathered pace at the beginning of the 20th Century, journalists soon discovered that “the division of labour and the subsequent standardisation of occupational practices did not result in a better work life, but in a struggle for economic and professional survival” (Hardt & Brennen 1995, p.x). Kevin Williams identifies this period as the beginning of the continuing struggle over “editorial freedom” between editors and owners (1997, p.7).

The mechanisation of newswork

According to Braverman (1974, p.251) the time frame for mechanisation and proletarianization of ‘middle class’ professions coincides with the consolidation of monopoly capitalism, during which the “modern structure of capitalist industry and finance began to take shape” and Capital begins to harness science for “the more rapid transformation of labour into capital” (Braverman 1974, p.252). Work, for the first time, became highly mechanised. In the process the machine became an effective managerial tool for controlling the workforce. In relation to journalism, Underwood writes that, over time, technological change in the newsroom has “done much” to assist managers to harness “hard-driving, egocentric, and often antiauthoritarian souls,” to create a “mass-produced commodity manufactured and merchandised on tight deadlines” (1993, p.73).

The first round of ‘mechanisation’ in the workplace also began to affect journalists in the first years of the industrial revolution. Newsworkers were “increasingly bordered, and in turn valued, by their technological place in the production process of gathering, writing and producing news” (Salcetti 1995, p.49). Salcetti’s comments refer to the industrial revolution, but technology is never constant and changes in the ways that technologies of newsgathering, writing and dissemination are deployed have changed work practices in the same way that the assembly line revolutionised the mass production of manufactured goods. The technology of television has also impacted on the journalistic role and function of newspapers:

Technology, which should make it possible to be more immediate, has instead somehow managed to make newspapers more like reflections and annotations of the previous night’s television news which, of course, those involved in newspaper production rarely have time to watch. (Simons 1999, p.13)

Of course it also works the other way and commercial television reporters will often take their lead from the front-page splash in the morning tabloids. Radio has also become a medium which ‘breaks’ new stories, particularly when politicians make a point of announcing or confessing on talkback. In television newsrooms new technology has also brought new constraints such as the “need for [more] role specialists and coordinative activities” (Bantz et. al 1997, p.271)

From Fourth Estate to Fortress Wapping

As Schultz (1989; 1994; 1998) has argued, the journalistic values of democratic liberalism – characterised as ‘the Fourth Estate’ – are compromised by the need of the media industry to show a profit for those who invest in news just as they might invest in ‘widgets’. This is often (if not universally) acknowledged in the sociology of journalism (Berkowitz 1997 and others), but the implications are not fully understood by those whose tools of analysis do not fully embrace the labour theory of value. Instead the literature is full of simplistic theory, such as “content of the news media inevitably reflects the interests of those who pay the bills” (Altschull 1997, p.259). It’s not as simple as this. As we shall see, the full picture

is only revealed in the interplay between complex and subtle forces – the social relations of news production.

In his novel *The Fourth Estate* Jeffrey Archer (1996) has one of his characters express this view:

*‘The truth, the whole truth, and anything but the truth,’ said
Townsend, smiling. ‘Just as long as it sells papers.’* (Archer 1996,
p.11)

Townsend is obviously based on the international media mogul Rupert Murdoch³⁴ and the novel’s other protagonist, Armstrong, is a thinly disguised caricature of the late Robert Maxwell. In Archer’s story the two men are engaged in a life and death struggle - not to produce a better newspaper, but to be the richest and most powerful media baron. In the novel, as in real life, the men are under no illusion that first and foremost they’re capitalists. In the novel, as in real life, they behave accordingly. The reporting staffs on the fictional newspapers they control are pawns in a global chess game, hired and fired as necessary to maintain a competitive edge over the rival media capitalist.

In the 1940s the fictional Keith Townsend spends time apprenticed to another publisher where he observes: “Surely in the end, however massive a paper’s circulation was, the principal aim should be to make as large a return on your investment as possible” (Archer 1996, p.150). Later in the novel, Archer has Townsend express the view that:

*the shop floor at the Express was overmanned by a ratio of three to
one, and that, while wages made up its largest outgoings, there could
be no hope of a modern newspaper group being able to make a
profit. In the future someone was going to have to take on the unions.*
(Archer 1996, p.150)

This is of course what Murdoch did at ‘Fortress’ Wapping in 1986 when he moved his British newspaper operations out of Fleet Street to London’s

³⁴ Townsend begins his newspaper career on a provincial paper in Australia, move his operations to London and eventually into the American market – just like Murdoch.

docklands area, locking out the journalists' union in the process and with the full support of then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

Despite the machinations of the Murdochs and Maxells of the newspaper industry, it would seem that the ideology of the Fourth Estate is still strong among journalists the world over and certainly in English-speaking liberal democracies like Australia³⁵. The most significant survey of Australian journalists' attitudes in the last 20 years, the Media and Democracy Project found that most newswriters identify with this construct. 80 per cent of those surveyed agreed with the statement:

"The Australian media defines itself as the Fourth Estate...Do you personally favour the notion of the media as a Fourth Estate, or do you believe it should be thought of as just another business."

(Schultz 1998, p.257)

Only six per cent believed journalism should be considered "just another business". When asked if the actual situation in Australia reflected the values of the Fourth Estate only 19.9 per cent said yes; 39 per cent reported that they believed the Australian media was behaving like "just another business". Faith is one thing, observation of reality another thing altogether! It's not uncommon for such surveys of journalists' opinions to reflect the contradictory nature of grey collar journalism. The American studies in Berkowitz (1997) all comment on the "liberal"³⁶ attitudes of news staff when compared to their paper's owners. Breed's study demonstrates that even during the Cold War years of the mid 1950s, many newswriters held views that could be considered to the left of their employers (Breed 1997, p.108). Schudson (1997, p.15) cites studies by Lichter and others published in *The Media Elite: America's New Powerbrokers* (1986) in which American journalists self-report their liberal attitudes. At the same time, Schudson suggests, these newswriters "fully accept the framework of capitalism

³⁵ This theme is pursued in Chapter 7, *Profitability and Public Interest*.

³⁶ When discussing the politics of American journalists *en masse* we must always remember Schudson's cautionary tone "'liberal' in the peculiarly American sense of that term" (1997, p15).

although some of them wish it had a human face” (1997, p.16). In other words, they’re not very left wing at all.

How do we explain this contradiction? This chapter and the next explore this question by examining the apparent disparity between the economic position of newswriters and the consciousness they display. I argue that reporters are overwhelmingly working class, but at the same time they cling to an ideology of middle class professionalism. This is the essence of the grey collar thesis: economic and social forces encountered in the workplace put countervailing pressures into play that help to determine a consciousness that can be on the one hand quite ‘liberal’, or even pro-worker and on the other seemingly pro-Capital.

Journalists - Trusted Ideologues?

A useful explanation of this apparent contradiction in the emotional attitudes displayed by newswriters can be easily explained by reference to the concept of contradictory class locations and what Alex Callinicos describes as the “element of trust” that is established when Capital delegates part of its managerial functions to employees:

The ruling class, forced to delegate part of their role to their employees, needs to be able to rely on these delegates to exercise the discretion involved in a manner conducive to their own interests, and therefore offers to those in contradictory class locations considerable financial rewards. (Callinicos 1989b, p31)

Here Callinicos is discussing a *management* function, but I believe that the same holds true for grey collar journalists who are entrusted with a similar *ideological* function on behalf of Capital. Some senior journalists are very well paid for performing to the expectations of the ruling class. In chapter 4 this is dealt with in relation to reportage of the national interest. It is this ideological function of journalism that creates the duality in news production and which dictates the range of emotional attitudes that newswriters express. The contradictory class location of newswriters situates them - as individuals - along the continuum that is the emotional dialectic. This is discussed further in later sections of this chapter. Again we can turn to the work of Poulantzas on the economic, political and ideological contours of the new petty bourgeoisie (new middle class) and the

role of newswriters in intellectual labour that directly contributes to the extraction of surplus value (either out of direct production or circulation). As members of this class forced by the economic needs of monopoly capitalism in a proletarian direction (Carchedi 1977, p.101) newswriters have no “autonomous class political position”, therefore, their ideological disposition (emotional attitude) “must necessarily be located in the balance of forces between the bourgeoisie and the working class” (Poulantzas 1975, p.297). This is a contradictory location that combines the “global function of capital and the function of the collective worker...in varying balance” (Carchedi 1977, p.88). The following section indicated how this process has occurred historically by gradually turning the newsroom based on craft distinctions into a modern industrial sweatshop.

An Electronic Sweatshop: The changing architecture of the newsroom

The Australian author and journalist, George Johnston, painted a fairly bleak picture of a Melbourne newspaper office in the 1930s in his famous novel, *My brother Jack* (1964). The offices of the fictional *Morning Post* - most likely the Melbourne *Argus* where Johnston worked in the 1930s (Sekules 1999, p.89) - are described as “warrens of little rooms and airless cubby-holes divided by frosted glass and mahogany”, where the classifieds were composed and the accounts settled (Johnston 1964, p.187). The fictional reporters’ room at the *Post* was larger and grander:

divided into two main rooms on either side of the chief-of-staff’s glassed-in box...fifteen subs [sat] around a huge elliptical table, all wearing green eye-shades and stooped over...as if they were all slightly cowed by the basilisk presence of Mr. Farnsworth, who had been there as chief sub for as long as anybody could remember...and he had a row of lead-based spikes in front of him, and to his left the teleprinter and he gawping, faintly hissing mouths of the pneumatic tubes. (Johnston 1964, p.189)

Fifty years later things were not all that different at News Limited’s Holt Street headquarters in central Sydney:

*The News Limited building [was] noisy, dirty, overcrowded,
chockablock with deadlines and a Mahogany Row more interested,
we thought, in profits than prose.* (Krause 1999, p.7)

If Tim Krause was talking about ‘yesterday’, Johnston was writing about journalism at a time when the ‘mechanisation’ of news production in Australia was only beginning to catch up with the rest of the world. The scenes are separated by more than half a century, but the process had the same impact on “the role and work duties of newspaper reporters and increasing capitalization–commercialization of the newspaper industry” (Salcetti 1995, p.51). In the first half of the 20th Century the teleprinter, the telephone and the telegraph all had an *impact* on newsgathering, not always for the better. In the latter stages of the 20th century it was the digital revolution brought about by an expanding arms economy and the exigencies of the Cold War. I deliberately use the term ‘impact’ here because technology does not simply superimpose itself on a production process, it is consciously articulated through the social relations of production.

When the first telegraph connected Australia to Europe in 1859 the London-based Reuter’s news agency became the monopoly supplier of cable news to Australia and New Zealand (Rantanen 1998, pp.35–48). This is partly why I dispute those who argue for a relatively new phenomenon of the information revolution (Wark 1994; Hinkson 1996; Barr 2000). The age of globalization began in effect 150 years ago with the ‘cable’ technology of the telegraph wire. The news agencies have always been active players in the introduction of new technologies to newsgathering and dissemination. Reuters was instrumental in the laying of telegraph cable in the second half of the 19th Century and one of the first to take full advantage of satellite technology in the 20th (Boyd–Barrett, 1998, pp.32–33). Snoddy (1992) suggests the introduction of the telephone meant that journalists stayed in the office “rather than getting out and meeting the people they’re writing about” (p.144).

Of course, in the late 20th Century the fax machine and the Internet strengthened this tendency to gather news from the reporter’s room, rather than the street. Schultz (1998) reports studies that show up to 90 per cent of news is generated from media releases that are distributed by fax, or even on videotape (see for example Ward 1991; Zawawi 1994). As Snoddy writes, this tendency “has put

pressure on standards” and as a former senior Fleet Street editor told Snoddy: “It happened because of the emphasis on competition and circulation battles” (Montgomery, cited in Snoddy 1992, p.145). There’s no doubt that editors and senior journalists recognise that work practices have a direct impact on news values, the veracity of a story and the quality of the reporting. As Gaye Tuchman noted in an early study of newswork, regulating the flow involves complex processes of scheduling, allocation of resources and the “control of work through prediction” (1997, p.181).

Tom Wolfe was one of the founding fathers of American ‘new journalism’ who came up through the ranks of the US newspaper system in the 1950s. In the late 1960s, tired of writing boring 700 word features for the *New York Herald Tribune* Wolfe began experimenting with new styles (Hirst 1998b). In part, Wolfe’s attempts to break out of the confines of daily news reporting were a reaction to the work routines and conditions of the day. He describes the *New York Herald Tribune* newsroom in the early 1960s as “one big pie factory” and remembers it being painted “industrial sludge”, the same colour as the floor in the “tool and die works”, “a grim distemper of pigment and filth” (1973, p.4). This decor would have been familiar to Wolfe’s contemporaries in other American newspapers, and indeed, around the world: “Most newspapers were like that,” Wolfe writes, “[t]his setup was instituted decades ago for practical reasons.” Wolfe’s New York contemporary, Gay Talese himself a talented writer paints a similar picture in the ‘new journalist’ mould. In his memoir of the *New York Times* of the 1960s Talese describes the paper’s headquarters as “a large fourteen-floor fact factory on Forty-third street off Broadway” (1969, p.2).

While neither writer elaborates the reasons, it’s not hard to surmise that the industrial conditions reflected the needs of the newspaper proprietors and that the physical conditions of newspaper production reflect the control mechanisms outlined by Gaye Tuchman.

Most newspaper offices today are *probably* considerably cleaner than the those of the *Times* or the *Tribune*, but they are still ‘fact factories’ and the basic open plan remains: “there were no interior walls” (Wolfe 1973, p.4). The reporters of today labour at computerised workstations rather than in serried ranks at battered Remingtons.

A breakthrough study of technology, environment and workplace design in the Australian context (Dombkins 1993, pp.29–51) is the only comprehensive study I've come across, though Beate Josephi at Edith Cowan University is working on similar studies. Dombkins has looked at the organisational structure of the *Sydney Morning Herald* as it was in 1962 and then compares it to how it is in 1992. She notes that over a period of 30 years, “the role of the journalist has changed” and that they are necessarily “multiskilled”:

The traditional mandatory shorthand, although still used, is not as essential [as in 1962]. News sense is still the main skill. Journalists now need word processing skills, not just adequate typing skills. Promotion is now based more on ability than seniority. Training has moved from the traditional craft-based training through the cadetship system to university training and a limited cadetship.
(Dombkins 1993, p.36)

When Dombkins did this study in 1992 the Fairfax organisation was in the process of, once again, updating its computer system for journalists and subs – with obvious knock on effects for the blue collar trades (plate-making, etc). She notes that computerised copy control “provided owners and senior management with the power to control journalistic output”, but adds that “through industrial action” journalists were able to resist to a point, while productivity per journalist increased by 15 per cent (1993, p.48).

Reed (1998) takes a similar view of the Fairfax organisation. In line with this study, Reed examines the division of labour within a news organisation and the degree of managerial control over editorial outputs. She notes that professionalism, “and the autonomy it confers...has eluded journalists except for short periods and in limited circumstances” (Reed 1999, p.218). This discussion is taken up in other chapters, specifically 4, 5 and 7. Here I am only concerned to illustrate the ways in which the social relations of news production condition the intellectual climate and class-fractured lines. Reed insists on examining news technology and news production from the point of view of social relations, rather than the technological ‘artefact’:

Itself produced by the social relations of production...changes in the

organisation and design of the work precede specific developments in technical artefacts which are premised on the subdivision of tasks in the detailed division of labour. (Reed 1999, p.219)

This reflects the approach of Krause on the division of labour in the creative professions and among intellectuals: pure versus applied work, individual or group processes, generalist or specialist expertise (1971, p272). In the newspaper industry an “occupational ethos” arose, an “ideology which has defined journalists ‘professionalism’” (Reed 1999, p.221). In contrast to this newswriters were drawn into union activity over keyboard allowances. Ultimately though, by the mid 1980s many journalists had come to admire the new technology because it gave them greater *professional* control over their copy (Reed 1999, p.222). However, the gains of electronic copy-entry were not evenly shared: Reed points out that sub-editors, in particular, were unhappy, “the increased rewards for using the new technology...were not commensurate with their re-designed jobs” (Reed 1999, p.223). This is not surprising since the subs are often the more manual tasks; going over copy produced by others. The ideology of professionalism is more appealing to reporters with the freedom of by-lines. Now journalists are recognising the inherent contradictions in the technology in the adverse way it affects the social relations in the newsroom and between editorial and managerial pressures:

Journalists...experience both as contradictory. On the one hand they provide devices which facilitate and give greater control over a quality journalistic product. On the other they intensify the stresses and pressures of daily newspaper production as the area of responsibility for sub-editors broadens and management push deadlines forward...management have appropriated time savings from the new technologies...opportunities and democratisation...[have] not really eventuated. (Reed 1999, pp.224-225)

Reed concludes that journalists made small gains at the expense of printers as the new technology was introduced. What journalists regarded as wins, mainly in the form of payment for re-use of material, have come back to haunt them, “at the very time journalists had benefited from the industrial defeat of printers by

newspaper proprietors” (Reed 1999, p.228). This indicates the contradictory nature of the emotional attitudes of journalists. The limits of professionalism confront the reality of monopoly capitalism’s tactics of divide and rule. The grey collar *class interest* of most journalists would have been best served by working with the printers’ union, not against it. In this instance the media owners had a long-term win, “hard-won collective labour process controls and on-the-job autonomy are under challenge” (Reed 1999, p.228). These ideological fractures – the emotional dialectic – reflect the ideas associated with the contradictory class locations that newswriters occupy. This argument is taken up in chapter 3 in a discussion of Poulantzas’ new petty bourgeoisie in *Classes in contemporary capitalism* (1975).

Shortly after the Dombkins study in the mid-1990s, the Fairfax organisation moved from its Broadway (Sydney) headquarters to the new high-rise IBM tower at Darling Harbour. The move was not met with the same levels of resistance that Rupert Murdoch encountered at Wapping a decade earlier. This points to the increased passivity of the Australian Journalists’ Association over this period and is not surprising given the low level of union activity and declining membership over the past 25 years (MEAA 2000). It also suggests that grey collar journalists are not quick to question already established work practices and routines.

A further compelling argument for the idea that much of journalism is basically process work can be found in Barbara Garson’s *The Electronic Sweatshop* (1988) which documents the transformation of white collar work into repetitive manual labour via the technology of computer terminals:

In the nineteenth century the phrase “factory hand” suggested an interchangeable part or a tool to be used as needed. ...So far there’s no equivalent white-collar phrase like “hourly brain” or “piecework pencil” to describe the fast-growing class of consultants, freelancers, and executive temps. But there is a new ethic arising both toward them and among them. (Garson 1998, p.226)

This new ethic has been described as a “competitive ethos” that permeates “American corporate culture” (Ehrlich 1997, p.303). This ideological framework

exists in “certain rituals and routines” that newswriters adopt to “help them manage their work” to produce “a version of reality that rarely challenges the existing political and economic power structure” (Ehrlich 1997, p.304).

The trend to turn journalism into a more repetitive form of work, masked by the ideology and emotional attitudes of ‘professionalism’, is also evident in media organisations around the world, particularly in Britain, the United States and Australia (Reed 1988). Much has changed in newspaper production in the decade since Rupert Murdoch moved his English newspaper empire to the London industrial suburb of Wapping.

There were huge confrontations at Wapping as police and private security guards confronted picket lines. Unfortunately at Wapping and in Australia the unions covering newspapers could not agree on an effective strategy to defend jobs. Word-processing and typesetting functions were effectively ‘blended’ and printers lost out to journalists³⁷ who “were in a position to gain from the change” (Reed 1988, p.34).

Jeffrey Archer incorporates Murdoch’s Wapping venture into *The Fourth Estate* (1996) and in this fictional account, journalists on the *Globe* newspaper complain to Keith Townsend about the poor working conditions in the new plant and Archer notes that:

Once they were inside, few of them cared for the production-line atmosphere, [or] the modern keyboards and computers which had replaced their old typewriters. (Archer 1996, p.421)

In the real world, British journalist and author Raymond Snoddy wrote of how Murdoch’s 1986 move to Wapping helped develop and entrench Ehrlich’s emotional attitude of competition amongst newswriters:

Most of the unions were left outside the gates at Wapping. Journalists were able to enter their copy directly into computer terminals, and, after editing on screen, their articles were automatically turned into

³⁷ This was very much the case at the Fairfax organisation in the late 1970s, journalists were prepared to cross the printers’ picket lines and then a few years later when the journos were on strike the printing unions returned the favour.

print by a computerised typesetter. (Snoddy 1992, p.14)

Media barons - yesterday, today and tomorrow?

What was that about ‘life imitates art’? Murdoch’s eventual success at Fortress Wapping created a climate in which other newspaper proprietors turned on their own journalists and printers. Robert Maxwell sacked one third of his workforce and so did United Newspapers, publishers of the *Daily Express* and other papers (Snoddy 1992, p.14).

As Snoddy notes, because of “the revolution in technology and industrial relations, the big media barons are virtually as powerful as they ever were” (1992, p.15). The key linkage here is technology *and* industrial relations. Technology is not neutral, but it is always embraced by relations of production (industrial relations) and it exists in a dialectical relationship of determination with the social context surrounding its deployment in the production process. In part the spirit of competition within and between news organisations – the ‘scoop’ – and a culture of winning in circulation and ratings underpins the power of the media owners. Newswriters appear to readily embrace this emotional attitude of competition in their work practices and delight in being ‘first’ with the story. Ehrlich suggests we can understand the competitive ethos “in terms of newswriters and their organizations consistently measuring their performance against that of selected other newswriters and news organizations (1997, p.304). Through this process the emotional attitudes of individual newswriters can be surveilled and dissonance kept in check.

The power of the media barons is further exemplified by the way they treat those who work for them. John Mathews discusses the newspaper industry in *Tools of Change* (1989) and notes that the move to computerise typesetting (once done by printers and now done by the journalists themselves), “has been one of the more spectacular of the industrial battles over new technology”. It was a battle that the media unions were unprepared for:

Most print and media unions have been caught off-guard by the speed of these developments [and] managerial prerogatives over the work process...the technology has been introduced with new work organisation that transfers work from print union members to other

employees...[in] the classic style of Fordism. (Mathews 1989, p.73)

The technology of word-processing that allowed this transfer of labour from printers to journalists is now commonplace throughout the offices of the world. However, its introduction to the newspaper industry in the late 1970s was not accidental: it was done to shore up the profitability of newspapers. Reed suggests that this represents both ‘continuity’ and ‘discontinuity’ in the newspaper industry:

...a continuation of twentieth century technical developments in printing technology and a decisive discontinuity in the social relations of print. (Reed 1988, p.37)

This is an important distinction that highlights the importance of not falling into the trap of technological determinism - there is always continuous ‘revolutionising’ of the means of production in a dialectical ‘orbit’ with the relations of production. As Reed’s comment suggests, it is when the technology (rather, the way it is introduced into the labour process) clashes with existing relations of production that sparks fly.

Bantz et. al. (1997) make a similar point about television - change is not driven by the technology, but by a combination of technology and shifting work practices. Importantly, there is a rider on this: other factors, such as costs and scheduling of equipment throughout a shift may undermine an organisation’s ability to maximise the use of new technology (Bantz et. al. 1997, p.271). In short, the social relations of production impede the flow of benefits embodied in the technology.

The force of market pressures

The market pressures experienced by the media industries since the mid 1970s (see Underwood 1993) have led to cost cutting and the attacks on wages and conditions that are typical of how Capital treats labour, particularly when the bottom line is under threat. In the early 1980s, in order to bring costs under control and to arrest declining audience reach (as measured by circulation and ratings), media organisations began to bring in new managerial expertise, “a cross between an editor and a marketing official” (Underwood 1993, p.15). To

this extent the media is just like any other business and journalists just like other workers – ultimately expendable.

Edit point

There is plenty of evidence (McQueen 1977; Underwood 1993; Schultz 1994; Schultz 1998) for the monopoly nature of media organisations and the fluctuations of an uncertain market; features common to contemporary global capitalism in crisis. This suggests that the media *as an industry* relies on the same basic economic structures and development as any other commodity-producing enterprise in a market economy. It is therefore worth examining the proposition that as labourers in the news production process, journalists are similarly enmeshed with the organisations that employ them and own their output – the newspaper or magazine article, current affairs show, or television news broadcast. In short, the task is to discuss the question: Which social class do journalists belong to?

Journalism as work: A class analysis

According to Mathew Engel (1996), Murdoch's British newspaper offices at Wapping remains "a weird and dispiriting place: inside more like Ford's Dagenham plant than the traditional happy chaos of a newspaper office" (Engel 1996, p.305). From Engel's description we can say that Rupert Murdoch's newspaper 'factory' resembles the classic Fordist industrial structure: "mass production, assembly line techniques and scientific management" (Mathews 1989, p.27).

Post-Fordist collaboration - Again!

Matthew Engel's comparison to the Ford automobile assembly plant is also interesting from another angle. Since the late 1970s there has been discussion in industrial sociology of 'neo-Fordist' production techniques and work organisation that attempted to humanise the workplace and thus increase productivity (Mathews 1989, p.34). In the context of this thesis I would suggest that what Mathews is describing here is attempts to mould the emotional attitudes of workers and the psychology of the workplace in order to increase productivity through increased social control over the production process.

Mathews argues that by the end of the 1980s Fordist and “neo-Fordist” management strategies were failing and that the “dominant industrial system...involving mass production of goods as its key competitive feature, is in crisis, and cannot easily be rescued” (1989, p.34). The answer to this crisis, according to Mathews is a “post-Fordist” system of production based on innovation and specialisation and “a strategy that is placing greater reliance on the contribution of skilled labour to productivity” (1989, p.35). Mathew’s book *Tools of Change* is subtitled, *New technology and the democratisation of work*, and indicates his support for a strategy of co-operation between workers and bosses. In the context of newspapers, Mathews argues that the unions needed to make “positive and constructive” interventions to help management design a “user-friendly” and “post-Fordist” typesetting system (1989, p.75). Finally, Mathews argues, the end of Fordist and neo-Fordist production systems means that the labour movement must adjust its strategies, move away from conflict and look for “a notion of *strategic accommodation* between capital and labour” (1989, p.38):

Employers and unions may pursue their own interests, but with a common interest defined by the need to develop a flexible, innovative and efficient industrial system. We shall call this a post-Fordist strategy. (Mathews 1989, pp.38–39)

This is an explicit call for class collaboration and a rejection of the idea that Capital and labour are represented by two antagonistic social classes. Instead, we must grasp the “chance to eliminate Taylorist³⁸ practices, and thereby release the creativity and imagination that has been dammed up in workers forced to submit to the discipline of mass production” (Mathews 1989, p.39). Tom Bramble has written a damning critique of Mathews (Bramble 1990) in which he argues that alienation for workers is not just an ‘add-on’ to be fixed by releasing their creativity in the workplace:

³⁸ ‘Taylorism’, after Frederick Taylor, was a system of so-called ‘scientific management’ that measured each component of the production process and broke it down into its simplest repetitive components. Henry Ford adapted this system to the mass production of automobiles, hence ‘Fordism’.

The problem with the analyses suggested by Mathews and other promoters of work humanisation schemes is that they ignore the fact that alienation is not just a product of fragmented work tasks or the application of scientific management, but is rooted in the very nature of capitalism by the removal from the direct producers of any ownership or control over the means of production. (Bramble 1990, p.93)

The question of social control in the production process and the newsroom does not rest on the quality or number of ‘participation’ schemes; it is a function of the relations of production.

Sociologists and the missing link of ‘class’

The collection of essays edited by Daniel Berkowitz, *The social meaning of news* (1997) brings together a number of sociological perspectives on newswork. However, apart from Breed, none of them actually talk about class. In my mind this renders these analyses only a partial glimpse at the emotional attitudes that has as its focus the debate about professionalism. However, the collection has an important historical value in that otherwise inaccessible papers are made available to a wider student audience. This is not just a problem of media studies; it is evident across a range of disciplines in the social sciences, including labour process theory (Willis 1988). In media and cultural studies, Marx is no longer fashionable either inside or outside the academy. In earlier academic work Marx’ ideas were taken more seriously and Krause makes a good argument for the link between his socio-scientific construct “occupational consciousness” and what Marxists express as class consciousness:

We will use Marx’s idea in two ways here: first, showing that it can apply to specific occupational groups and families of occupations as well as to class groups... and second, showing how the occupational consciousness...may in fact prevent the cross-occupational combination of large numbers of people to overthrow the entire system. (Krause 1971, p.85)

This is an unambiguous reference to class consciousness and that it is held back by various management techniques and the use of “power and rewards of groups

in the present division of labour” (Krause 1971, p.86). In the case of newswriters, as demonstrated in the first chapter, the fractured class ideologies – the emotional dialectic in operation – are precisely related to the hegemony of social relations and production practices in the newsroom. Again, Krause highlights the negative impact of professionalism in the development of a broader class-consciousness among white-collar workers:

Here the aim is to gain status and reward through the construction of the external trappings of a profession. But the basic issue remains: either the group is performing a critical function which demands extensive training, and thus has ‘functional power’, or, if not, it must be willing to develop a group militancy and fight for its gains...in militant unity (a strong national labor union). (Krause 1971, p.86)

The question of class is obliquely but definitely identified. It’s therefore a little depressing to me personally that Marxism is unfashionable doesn’t make it irrelevant and it is necessary at this juncture to briefly restate the three basic ‘laws’ of Marxism:

?? all history is the history of class struggle;

?? class struggle does not disappear just because it is theoretically out of favour and

?? “modern bourgeois society...has not done away with class antagonisms” (Marx & Engels 1970, pp.32-33)

I base my theoretical outlook on what I consider to be the continuation of the Marxist tradition which is “much more than a powerful, historically oriented social theory,” because at its core is “a political project of human emancipation” (Callinicos 1991, p.17). At the heart of this project and explicit in the Marxist theory of history is the “dialectic of progress” which outlines two mechanisms for revolutionary change:

the development of systemic contradictions between the forces and relations of production, and the intensification, in these conditions, of the class struggle. (Callinicos 1995, p.161)

The purpose behind the grey collar journalism thesis is to indicate how Marx's general analysis of the conditions of labour in a capitalist society can be valuably applied to the sociology of journalism. I believe that the less-than-Marxist positions adopted by media theorists, even with the best-intentions, fall short of providing answers necessary to explain the contradictions inherent in market journalism. In short, there is no way to reform the contradictions out of the market system. Change can not be effected by "administrative reforms, based on the continued existence of these [capitalist] relations" (Marx & Engels 1970, p.70). I am not suggesting that newswriters can be the vanguard of the proletariat, but they can be useful as allies of the working class, if they understand and can act upon their position as grey collar workers. The emotional attitudes generated by newswriters class location can push them towards a class-consciousness and towards becoming organic intellectuals in the Gramscian sense. However, to prove my point I must demonstrate that the categories of analysis employed by Marx are more relevant and meaningful in the modern world of newswriting than the theories of bourgeois social science.

Class Location & Class Consciousness: The emotional dialectic of the grey collar journalist

The terms class location and class-consciousness are central to the proposition that journalists are indeed workers rather than professionals in the 'new middle class'. It is therefore important to define these terms using a framework of Marxist class analysis. Briefly they can be characterised as follows.

Class location

The objective location in the class structure of capitalism occupied by a particular member of the workforce. Class location is determined by an individual's relationship to the productive process and to capital. It is fundamentally detachable from a person's perception of their class position. This objective class location of wage earners is defined by Braverman as "that class which does not own or otherwise have proprietary access to the means of labor [Capital], and must sell its labor power to those who do...the definition encompasses occupational strata of the most diverse kinds" (1974, p.25). Marxists do not limit membership of the proletariat to any "fixed structure of occupation," instead they recognise that it is constantly being reshaped "in line

with the changing requirements of capital” (Callinicos 1989a, p.8). Classes are defined “in terms of the exploitative relations of production which constitute the society in question” (Callinicos 1989b, p.13) and an individual’s position within the class structure by “his or her relationship to the means of production” (Callinicos 1989b, p.14).

As noted earlier in this chapter, I have suggested that grey collar journalists occupy what Callinicos has called ‘contradictory class locations’ whose “occupiers” “share some of the properties of different classes, and are therefore pulled in different directions” (Callinicos 1989b, p.27). The shared properties are elements of control over the production process and means of production (but not necessarily ownership) and therefore also shared emotional attitudes and ideological perspectives. The New Left economist Nicos Poulantzas was one of the first to examine the contradictory class locations of what he calls the new petty bourgeoisie, determined by its place in the social division of labour. In effect this social grouping and the occupations it encompasses “does not have in the long run any autonomous class position. It is a ‘sub-ensemble’, a dialectical mix under the contested influence of the two major classes (1975, p.287). This is closely aligned to Gramsci’s position discussed in the opening chapter: that intellectuals are loosely aligned until they are drawn more closely into political organisation and can often hold contradictory ideas. Among conservative layers of this social grouping the dominant ideology is based on moral order, social promotion, a tendency to see the State as neutral in social conflict, demands for state-welfare, subservience to bureaucratic or technical authority and its “situation in relation to mental labour” (Poulantzas 1975, p.293). In a later elaboration Poulantzas argues that the divisions within mental (intellectual) labour leads to fragmentation of tasks and knowledge among a broader, less powerful group (Braverman’s proletarianization of white collar work). This leads to intellectual labour being mechanised and bureaucratised and it has already been demonstrated that these tendencies and conditions exist inside the news industry. This process – changes in the social relations of production – polarises sections of the new petty bourgeoisie in the direction of the two major classes thus creating what Poulantzas names as class “fractions” (1975, p.314). Chief

among these is the new petty bourgeois and the traditional, a similar distinction has already been noted among intellectuals and newspaper editors.

For grey collar journalists, there are undoubtedly some (editors for example) who occupy the higher reaches of these contradictory class locations and might therefore be expected to share the emotional attitudes of Capital. However, I argue that the vast majority of newswriters are at the lower end and tending towards sympathetic resonance with the proletariat:

Their class determinations place them in the petty-bourgeois camp, but in such a way that they are clearly objectively polarized in the direction of the working class. (Poulantzas 1975, p.314)

The examples of teachers, the lower and vast reaches of the public service, white collar clerical workers and journalists all spring to mind here and are referred to throughout the occupational sociology literature. The key for Poulantzas is that they are pushed towards the working class ideologically and politically in ways that do not “purely and simply coincide with the economic relations in which their agents are located,” instead he refers to “the overall coordinates of the social division of labour” (1975, p.315). This is precisely the grey collar argument in the specific case of journalists and other editorial newswriters: the objective location of journalists is as wage-labour, but the overlaying of a professional ideology over the top of the economic relations distorts both. This is how the emotional dialectic attempts to solve the antithesis: editorial freedom versus commercial interests of the enterprise. Thus a grey collar consciousness is an expression of this contradiction – an emotional attitude that eventually makes its way onto the front-page. To fully understand the grey collar consciousness it is necessary to outline a general statement of class-consciousness.

Class-consciousness

Throughout this thesis I have been using the term ‘emotional attitude’, which I have taken from Orwell, to talk about consciousness and I have suggested that there is a dialectic, or continuum of emotional attitudes, that reflects and expresses this consciousness in an uneven manner, dependent on (determined by) the prevailing relations of production and the state of play in the class struggle. In this section, this process of consciousness is related to the contradictory class

locations occupied by grey collar journalists as “semi-autonomous employees”, but subject to the shifting “frontier of control” in the workplace (Callinicos 1989b, pp.28-29).

At the outset it is important to note that an individual’s class consciousness may not correspond to their objective location in the class structure of any given society, indeed it may clash violently (Callinicos 1989b, p14). Braverman’s useful definition of class-consciousness will suffice here, it is “that state of social cohesion reflected in the understanding and activities of a class or portion of a class” which has an “absolute” expression in the self-knowledge of a group ‘toward its position in society’. Class-consciousness is expressed in a “relative” way in the “slowly changing traditions, experiences, education, and organisation of the class” over time and in the short term by a “dynamic complex of moods and sentiments affected by circumstances and changing with them” (1974, pp.29–30). Thus, at all times a class will express some form of consciousness about itself even if it is “for long periods...weak, confused, and subject to manipulation by other classes” (Braverman 1974, p.30). The various ‘levels’ of class consciousness on display at certain times is subject to and determining of the emotional dialectic of an epoch.

We might add, for the sake of completeness another definition of class-consciousness that revolves around the Gramscian term “praxis”, which Rupert defines as the ability to understand the world around us through self-conscious activity:

to view ourselves and the world around us in relation to our own productive activities, the historically specific ways in which these are organised, and the transformative possibilities implicit within that organisation. (Rupert 1992, pp.82-83)

I argue that the best of the grey collar journalists exhibit precisely these qualities in their writing. Writers like Orwell and John Pilger for instance have a well-matured emotional attitude very firmly attached to the working class. Like

Orwell, Pilger is happy to describe himself as a socialist³⁹ and is a regular contributor to left-wing media.

In contrast to this classical Marxist definition, there are several competing forms of class-consciousness that arise out of ideology. One is ideology itself — that is the subjective worldview held by an individual. This can be compared to the idea of *false consciousness*: a way of seeing the world that is a product of the alienation of labour under capitalist conditions of production, in which the relations of production “appear as things given by nature and, as such universal and necessary” (Rupert 1993, p.83)

Secondly there is the emphasis on cultural consciousness based on the argument that the strength of the ruling class lay in the cultural power exercised over the proletariat in civil society (ie. outside the economy and the State). However, Gramscian critics are right to dismiss this as placing too much emphasis on an independent role for culture (Harris 1992, p.26).

Conventional sociology measures itself

A third potential meaning of class-consciousness is the sociologically defined position of individuals with reference to standard demographics, such as income and status. Krause (1971) is unusual in occupational sociology in that he does not, at first, conflate these issues. This sociological definition is also ideological in the sense that sociology has developed as a social science within capitalism and is therefore subject to the distortions imposed through its history. Braverman is scathing in his criticism of this “conventional stream of social science” suggesting that sociologists are “measuring not popular consciousness but heir own”, which “leaves to sociology, the function, which it shares with personnel administration, of assaying not he nature of the work but the degree of adjustment of the worker” (Braverman 1974, pp.27-29).

Baxter, Emmison and Western (1991) provide a descriptive account of class in Australia that attempts to quantify regional differences due to the dispersed

³⁹ Pilger was in Australia recently (January 2002), but I didn’t get to see him. He spoke at a forum organised by Socialist Alliance and, according to friends who were there said he was a socialist.

nature of the major industrial centres and accidents of geography. Other factors specific to the Australian context include changes in occupational structures of the workforce “which can be argued as a consequence of the crisis of capitalism and the search for new areas of surplus value — though this implies a consequent [offsetting] increase in the *proletariat*” (p.8). In opposition to this Weberian sociology of class, a Marxist approach offers a simpler, but more effective definition of working class as:

Those who do not own or control the means of production, who must therefore sell to employers their ability to work, and who exercise no substantial degree of control over their own labour or the labour of others. (Fieldes 1996, p.22)

Fieldes goes on to argue that narrowing this definition is inadequate and that attempts to confine the modern proletariat to blue collar workers leads to “unsustainable distinctions” (1996, p.23). In this way Marxists argue that so-called ‘white collar’ workers fit the definition of working class laid out above:

White collar workers cannot be distinguished from their blue collar counterparts by their wage levels (which are, in fact, often lower), by their conditions of work (just as likely to be routinised or involve shiftwork), union membership (some white collar areas are now more highly unionised than the average), nor by ownership or control of the means of production – from which they too are excluded. (Fieldes 1996, pp.22–23)

Grey is just ‘off-white’

The question of white collar workers is central to the grey collar thesis and Alex Callinicos provides the clearest summary of the Marxist position arguing that three distinct groups of white collar workers must be distinguished within the contradictory class locations occupied by this group:

1. a “small minority” who are well-paid managers and ‘part-time’ members of the ruling class;
2. a much larger group of managers and supervisors, the ‘new middle class’ that is “intermediate between labour and capital” (Callinicos 1989a, p.7);

3. the majority of less well-paid “routine white collar workers” who have “little control over their work”.

Crucially, argues Callinicos, this third group, in which I place most grey collar journalists, “represents the *expansion*, not the decline, of the working class” (Callinicos 1989a, p.7).

This vital distinction is not made in the labor process theories in the collection edited by Evan Willis, *Technology and the labour process* (1988) where the key question is one of collective *coordination* of production versus managerial *control*. This is less political and less confrontational than a Marxist class approach. The debate between Marxism and its sociological variants foregrounds the importance and relevance of a class analysis in what many theorists describe as the 'post-industrial' world. Baxter, et.al. (1991) suggest that as a social indicator the concept of class “is of far less importance than its workplace manifestations might suggest”, and is of “minimal significance in how people construct their social identities” (p.4). I disagree with this formulation and suggest it is precisely the “workplace manifestations” of class that create the emotional dialectic and form the attitudes of grey collar workers. As John Soloski argues, for journalists the ideology of professionalism plays a significant role in how news workers construct their social identity. According to this account, professionalism “is an efficient and economical method” for controlling the behaviour of newswriters (Soloski 1997, p.139). Professionalism is an “informal and flexible” ideology used to justify the reporter’s self-perception that she or he is not a worker, but rather a member of the white-collar middle class working in a “complex and unpredictable environment” (Soloski 1997, p.139). This is the cohort to whom the shared *ideology of professionalism* would allocate journalists, along with doctors, lawyers and academics. Nurses and teachers might perhaps be included at the lower socio-economic margins of this group. Professionalism provides a set of ideological blinkers, which obstruct the newswriter’s clear vision of their role. It can be argued in the context of grey collar Journalism that it is one factor (and perhaps the most important) that prevents newswriters from achieving a clear class-consciousness.

An alternative approach is well described by Harman and Callinicos (1989), who suggest that the working class is not disappearing, in fact, or in theory. On the

contrary, it is, they argue, dialectically and inevitably involved in the constant restructuring of capital and the relations of production within an evolving, but still Capitalist mode of production. In a period of prolonged economic crisis, such as we witnessed during the 1990s, there is a certain amount of “reorganisation and restructuring” of relations of production and, “the working class itself participates in this process as some jobs are destroyed and others are created” (Callinicos 1989a, p.8). In this schema workers are active participants in the creation and reproduction of the conditions under which they labour – a process of constant class struggle with its attendant victories and defeats. In other words the constant ‘revolutionising’ of the means of production within capitalist relations of production creates the conditions under which the emotional dialectic of an epoch is formed and *as a class*, workers participate in this process on a daily basis.

In my view the work of journalists *objectively* puts them firmly in the camp of the proletariat, despite their claims to professionalism, a vocation or a craft. Journalists are indeed workers, but perhaps with grey collars, rather than the traditional blue (manual) or white (managerial) collars. While it is not clear from available workforce statistics, the evidence gleaned from ABS figures would indicate that journalists belong to a growing group of workers involved in recreation, personal and other services. Fieldes quotes figures from the Bureau of Statistics, which indicates this group grew from five per cent of the workforce in 1966 to 8.2 per cent in 1994⁴⁰. To give some context to these figures, during the same period employment in manufacturing fell from 26.2 per cent to 14.3 per cent (1996, p.24). Significantly, in the early 1990s almost 50 per cent of trade union members were in white-collar jobs (Fieldes 1996, p.29). Journalists are also quite likely to belong to their union. While no figures are given for journalists in Fieldes’ work, some newsrooms are highly unionised, even if the members are not always very active on their own behalf. Tellingly, the 1992 Journalism and Democracy Project survey of Australian journalists did not ask respondents if they were members of the union (Schultz 1998).

⁴⁰ It is hard to extrapolate too much from these figures, as journalism is not listed as a separate category.

The proletarianisation of newswork

As a result of the economic downturn of the 1980s and '90s it would appear that, like other 'white collar' and professional workers, journalists might be said to be undergoing a process of 'proletarianisation' – work once considered 'white collar' is being pushed more and more into a 'grey collar' class location (Braverman 1974). For example, educational requirements for a journalism cadetship have risen from the completion of high school to completion of a three year university degree, reflecting what Braverman describes as an “extension of mass education”, that has “increasingly lost its connection with occupational requirements” (1974, p.439). The results of these pressures are evident in journalism. Newsworkers are being pushed into accepting (or resisting) lower standards of pay and conditions. This idea is supported by Garson's (1988) thesis of the second industrial revolution by which the office of the future is being transformed into the factory of the past. This would suggest that the wage relationship between journalists and their employers creates its own tension and continuously pushes media workers to the *consciousness* of their real *class location* as workers in a capitalist production process (Callinicos & Harman 1989). If this is the case then it has important implications for the working through of the emotional dialectic into the dialectic of the front-page and for the operation of social control over newsroom work processes.

Professional newswork - a contradiction in terms

Australian theorist, Keith Windschuttle provides a useful argument to support this theory, noting that, “it has become increasingly difficult to confine the concept of the 'working class' to blue collar workers, or to characterise all white collar workers as 'middle class’” (1988, p.349). Windschuttle ends his brief explanation of journalists' class location by noting that:

On any meaningful notion of 'class' as a concept related to the social relations deriving from the system of production in a capitalist society like ours, journalists are not 'middle class' – nor, for that matter, are they part of any 'new petit bourgeoisie'...Journalists work for wages, [and] are part of the white-collar working class or, if you like, they are professional workers. (Windschuttle 1988, p.351,

emphasis added)

Here Windschuttle is highlighting an important source for the contradictory consciousness displayed by grey collar journalists. They are workers, but they are ‘professional’ workers. Talk about ‘split personality’!

Braverman’s work supports this view, newswriters produce both a service and a commodity and as such theirs is productive labour for the capitalist “since both are forms of [the] production of commodities...the object of which is the production not only of value–in–exchange but of surplus value for the capitalist” (1974, p.410). Journalism is also both manual and mental labour since it is:

carried on in the brain, but [also] takes form in an external product – symbols in linguistic, numeric, or other representational forms – [therefore] it involves manual operations such as writing, drawing, operating writing machines, etc – for the purpose of bringing this product into being. (Braverman 1974, p.316)

Daly and Willis argue that being a professional automatically places someone in the new middle class because their labour involves “mediating the relationship of domination and subordination” and the reproduction of labour power (1988, p.114). Certainly this is an attractive argument in relation to newswriters, they do exhibit a certain level of “self governance of the occupation,” but significantly, professionalism is a contradictory ideology that:

has important ideological consequences in blinding that facts of relative subordination and powerlessness by the professionals themselves, thus pacifying them. (Daly & Willis 1988, pp.114-115)

Daly and Willis add an important coda to my discussion of white collar and ‘new middle class’ work that is of particular importance to a discussion of grey collar journalists. While their study is concerned with the medical profession, some parallels and comparisons are valid. For both doctors and journalists the “democratic capitalist State” represents “a balance of forces and relations” within an array of “judicial, legislative, military and coercive institutions” (Daly &

Willis 1988, p.117). Thus the state has a role in defining the ideological and political boundaries of professionalism⁴¹.

Conclusion

The staffer has a low formal status vis-à-vis executives, but he is not treated as a 'worker'. Rather, he is a co-worker with executives; he entire staff cooperates congenially on a job they all like and respect: getting the news. The newsroom is a friendly and first-namish place. Staffers discuss stories with editors on a give-and-take basis. Top executives with their own offices sometimes come out and sit in on newsroom discussions. (Breed 1997, p.113)

This is the ideology of professionalism at work! An important feature of research into a thorough 'rank-and-file' history of journalism will be to consider the relationship between the ideology of professionalism among journalists, the process of control expressed as physical (economic) and social/cultural *relations of production* in the newsroom.

Is it any wonder then, that the public service values of journalism are under pressure from the interlocking commercial interests of the media moguls? James Carey writes that the communication cycle follows the pattern of business cycles in the capitalist economy, a 'long revolution' that contains 'moments of decisive alteration in existing social relations amidst longer periods of stability and stasis' (1993, p.6). We are perhaps confronting one of these altering moments as the 21st Century looms before us⁴².

However, it is not necessarily a new problem for the sociology of journalism. In fact as early as the mid 1960s American pioneers in the modern field of media sociology were grappling with the insight that journalism, as a labour process, was fundamentally a process fraught with contradiction. In particular, the instability created by trying to "routinize the processing of unexpected events" and that "without some method of coping with unexpected events, news

⁴¹ For a further discussion of this issue refers to Chapter 7: *Reviving the Fourth Estate*.

⁴² This issue is further addressed in Chapter 8: *Killing me softly*.

organizations, as rational enterprises, would flounder and fail” (Tuchman 1997, p.174).

While acknowledging the importance of Tuchman and other pioneers (Berkowitz 1997), my approach is broadly that of historical materialism, a Marxist framework (Hirst 1993; 1998a). It is a methodology that seeks “to link the individual practices and behaviours of the newsrooms to the broader structural conditions, which interact with, and impact upon, those practices”. In particular this requires “some form of theoretical engagement with that economic or commercial base” on which modern journalism stands (Oakham 1998, p.25–29). To carry this through, this thesis makes a strong case for adopting an industrial enterprise model for examining the labour of journalists and the production of the news commodity.

Bantz, McCorkle and Baade (1997) first adopted the “news factory” approach in an article for the journal *Communication Research* in 1980, but I believe they did not take this insight to its logical conclusion. Instead they pulled back and wrote that: “The factory metaphor for the newsroom is not a precise duplication of the traditional factory” (1997, p.274). While they acknowledged the importance of examining the reporters’ labour process as a production line, they failed to capitalise on this; rather they relied on a functional and structuralist approach to organisational behaviour. This is demonstrated by their caveat that “television news is affected by myriad historic, technological and ‘chance’ factors that constrain the realm of possibilities within the organisation” (Bantz et.al, 1997, p.270). Once you reach the point of ‘chance’ factors influencing the industrial sociology of journalism, it becomes impossible to fully articulate a materialist analysis of the social relations of production and only partial, individual conclusions can be drawn from the research:

It is clear a newsroom is not an assembly line as most persons conceive of one. However, newswork is accomplished within steps of organizing that are designed to use nearly identical reporters and photographers to produce a uniform product within a limited period of time. (Bantz et. al. 1997, p.282)

This chapter has examined the grey collar thesis from an almost purely economic perspective and has developed the ‘labour theory of journalism’ in the context of Marx’s labour theory of value. I have demonstrated that newswork is wage labour and that newswriters are involved in the production, circulation and realisation of surplus-value. On any objective analysis the vast majority of journalists are members of the working class. I have noted some exceptions to this general thesis, including the fact that some newswriters occupy the contradictory class locations associated with the sociological construct the ‘new middle class’ which at the upper end blends into the controlling ranks of the bourgeoisie, but at the lower end is being ‘proletarianised’ as the limited control function and relative autonomy of newswriters are eroded by changes in the relations of production and the dynamics of the media industries.

However, I have argued a consciousness of their proletarian standing is not necessarily clear to most newswriters. The class-consciousness of journalists is contradictory, in part because of the role the news media plays in creating and maintaining the hegemonic rule of Capital. This is further explored in several subsequent chapters, beginning with an exposition of how journalists absorb and reflect a ‘national interest’ perspective on politics.

Chapter 4

The emotional ties that bind: Grey Collar Journalists and the Nation-State

A political party attempts to position itself as the one which speaks for the nation, by aligning itself with dominant groups or constituencies...Similarly, other, less formally constituted groups of interests also make their bids for temporary identification with the discursive category 'the nation'. Beer companies define their product as the 'Australian' one; petrol companies mask their foreign ownership...What is won is the capacity to speak on behalf of the nation. (Turner 1994, p.11)

Journalism, the Nation-State and the National Interest

Throughout the 20th Century, journalists always believed they had the capacity and the right to speak on behalf of the nation. The media also seeks this capacity - to express the emotional dialectic that constitutes a nation (Mercer 1992). This chapter examines why this is the case and begins with an analysis of the dominant ideology that has historically bound Australian journalists to the Nation-State. The following sections of this chapter then document historical moments when the tension between national interest and class interest has been evident in the press and media of the time. For the purpose of analysis and discussion I have, where possible and appropriate, related this to the lives and work of individuals who embody one or another of the values under discussion.

This chapter shows how the Australian media is, and always has been with few exceptions, firmly attached to an emotional dialectic of the national interest. The exceptions, I argue, are evidence for the existence of a grey collar ideology among some newswriters. Consequent chapters then explore how these ‘ideological spectacles’ (Grattan 1991) operate in relation to the coverage of significant Australian foreign policy and domestic political issues of the past decade. The specific case studies include the representation of class in federal elections; emotional attitudes towards the Whitlam dismissal in 1975, republicanism in the 1990s and Gulf War I.

The emotional dialectic of the nation

Throughout this and the next three chapters I have applied the media archaeology approach, identified earlier - the excavation, sifting, sorting and classifying of media ‘artefacts’ - as a way of illustrating my argument that Australian journalism has, for the most part, always been sympathetic to a world-view characterised by the so-called ‘national interest’. That is, a position generally supportive of the emotional dialectic which informs the ‘narrative’ of the ‘nation’ - the ideological belief that the elected government embodies the national ideals, interests, culture and consciousness on *our behalf*.

The Nation-State:

The organising committee of the bourgeoisie

A democratic republic is the best possible political shell for capitalism, and, therefore, once capital has grasped this very best shell...it establishes its power so securely, so surely that no change, either of persons, of institutions, or of parties in the bourgeois-democratic republic, can shake this power. (Lenin 1976a, p.18)

It is my view, that the *raison d’être* of the media as Fourth Estate, established on the principles of bourgeois property relations (Marx & Engels 1970, p.50) is to uphold the interests of the capitalist state. It is perhaps not a coincidence that the French Revolution, which is credited with strengthening the principles of the so-called ‘free press’, is also historically recognised as the starting point for the modern Nation-State, “based on the transformation of subjects into citizens” (Hutchinson 1994, p.39). Or, in more Marxist language, “an enormous strengthening of the power and efficiency of the state apparatus” (Callinicos,

1983, p.101). Further, the Nation-State “developed within and is integral to a political/economic system of class rule” (Rupert 1993, p.75). Along with the Nation-State comes the formation and articulation - via the popular media - of an emotional dialectic that semiotically ‘represents’ the national interest.

John Dunn, in his introduction to *Contemporary Crisis of the Nation-State?* defines a Nation as “those [people] who belong together by birth (genetically, lineally, through familially inherited language and culture)”, and State as “those [citizens] who are fully subject to their own sovereign legal authority” (Dunn 1995, p.3). However, given the title of the volume, you might expect Dunn to regard the Nation-State as problematic. He does, thus:

The ideas that every nation should have its own state and that every state should be a single nation may not have much solid merit either as a normative or as practical proposals. But between them they have made a great deal of the political history of the twentieth century.
(Dunn 1995, p.3)

State and Revolution

I have already said that you are not likely to find another question which has been so confused, deliberately and unwittingly, by representatives of bourgeois science, philosophy, jurisprudence, political economy and journalism, as the question of the state. (Lenin 1976b, p.7)

In the 19th Century, after the French revolution of 1848 the bourgeois state sought legitimation by appearing not to rule directly in its own interests, preferring to separate the functions of the state from the marketplace. This apparent “division of labour within the state itself” (Callinicos 1983, p.103) is no more than a convenient fig leaf. It allows the ruling class to secure a hegemonic rule in which it can “enter into compromises with other classes, or fractions of classes, which will tone down social antagonisms and render [its] underlying domination more secure” (Callinicos 1983, p.103). In his famous pamphlet, *The Civil War in France*, Marx wrote that the bourgeoisie secured its power “at the same pace that the progress of industry developed, widened and intensified the

class antagonism between capital and labour” (1997, p.257). As this process unfolded, the nature of the new French State became clear:

Governmental power assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labour, of a political force organized to enforce social enslavement, of a mere engine of class despotism.
(Marx 1977, p.257)

For V. I. Lenin and the Russian Bolsheviks the question of state power was central to their plans for revolution, and in 1917 Lenin advanced Marx’s thesis that the state “is a product and a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class contradictions” (Lenin 1976a, p.9). At the beginning of the 21st Century, now that capitalism is a truly global system, the Nation-State is has become the dominant form of political organisation around the globe, so much so that it seems perfectly ‘natural’:

Accompanying this is a pervasive acceptance of the assumption of nationalism that nations are facts of nature that have differentiated humanity into distinctive cultural communities, each of which has its own territorial habitat and capacities for self-government. Most states justify their independent status by claiming to embody the political aspirations of a nationality... (Hutchinson, 1994, p.1)

Hutchinson also reminds us that 18th Century nationalism imposed a new (and in many cases unwelcome) discipline over pre-existing tribal, ethnic, religious and cultural regions in Europe, with consequences that we still feel today:

In short, the spread of nationalism has been accompanied by the proliferation of centralized states, each claiming legitimacy by virtue of its basis on the popular will. As these nation-states have formed, each in turn has sought international standing by virtue of its possession of the attributes of statehood, diplomatic missions, a military establishment, a strong economy integrated on national lines and so forth. (Hutchinson 1994, p.40)

In contemporary capitalist countries (in fact throughout the world), the public sphere and the media’s role in it are contiguous with the nation and bordered by the same physical, social and moral rules (see Graeme Turner 1993; 1994). The

media assists in maintaining these conditions for nationhood. At the apex of this system is the Nation-State. This is the ultimate apparatus of social control. In part it is a heavily armed agent of institutional violence on behalf of the capitalist property system: “a special power is created - special bodies of armed men” (Lenin 1976a, p.13). Also it is part the mythologised and eulogised defender of the nation’s honour: “A country without a foreign policy is one without a secure identity” (Booker 1976, p.237). The Nation-State appears to stand above this contested emotional dialectic. The attitudes it expresses are normalised as the hegemonic ideology.

Modernity & the crisis of legitimation

Istvan Hont (1995) takes up the theme of political crisis as symptomatic, in the view of some theorists, of the *crisis of modernity*. When this crisis of legitimation is “twinned with the idea of revolution”, the existence of modern Nation-States can be seen as the ‘cure’ for one crisis and the ‘source’ of the next (Hont 1995, p.168). If we examine the history of the last years of the 20th Century this is self-evident (the chaos of Eastern Europe and the Middle East are but two notable examples). The central cause of the apparent permanent crisis of the contemporary Nation-State is the fundamental contradiction between the global requirements and desires of Capital and the division of the world’s land-mass (and populations) into defined and guarded geographical entities. National borders and Nation-States will only be stable as long as they survive together with other nations in constant suspended opposition to one another. Modern State apparatuses define and maintain the political and military conditions for the reproduction of Capital and under which economic competition is played out. With dry understatement, Hont describes “the dangers of free international markets” as “a persistently difficult problem of politics since [Nation-States] began” (1995, p.170).

Securing the emotional dialectic of ‘nation’

There are many definitions of ‘the national interest’, but they all basically rely on the unitary idea that a nation is made up of individuals whose allegiance to the nation is greater than any sectoral interest. In this way the vexing issue of class is ignored and ‘we’ can all unite against whatever the current ‘common’ enemy might be.

One of the most important political spheres in which the ideology of national interest circulates is foreign policy, which in its ‘textbook’ form is benign and perfectly ‘natural’:

All nations have foreign policies of some sort because each is a member of the community of nations which make up the international political system and each needs to deal in some measure with the other members. (Palfreeman 1988, p.ix)

In contrast to this colourless and non-threatening explanation, the conduct of foreign policy is hardly ever benign and congenial. In truth, international *realpolitik* is far more fraught with dangers, particularly in relation to the complex issues of economics, competition and diplomacy, that must be faced daily. For instance, Richard Palfreeman articulates a view that “the desperation of the deprived, together with an easier availability of weapons of mass destruction, is the single most dangerous issue to be dealt with”, and “as we may freely observe, violence between states may erupt anywhere almost without warning”, he continues:

It is not the intention here to paint a doomsday picture of the global condition, but rather to point out that Australians [all of us], who are a mere fraction of the world’s people, enjoying a prosperous and ordered way of life, live in a world characterised by issues and problems which pose exciting challenges as much as serious dangers.
(Palfreeman 1998, p.xi)

How then does the Nation-State manage its affairs and keep its borders secure? In extreme cases through armed force against external threats and heavy repression against internal dissent (usually the conditions for what we euphemistically call a ‘Civil War’). Short of this heavy-handed approach, Nation-States can rely on a range of institutions and social relations to undertake what Herman and Chomsky (1988) call the *manufacture of consent*. One way Nation-States go about doing this is by securing agreement about what *is* and what *is not* in the best interests of the nation as a whole. Such things are said to be ‘in the national interest’. Things can also therefore be ‘against’ the national interest. I am suggesting here that the ‘national interest’ is a hegemonic

emotional attitude of late capitalism and that it exerts a powerful influence on the dialectic of the front-page. It is particularly evident during times of crisis such as that surrounding asylum-seekers and a Norwegian freighter, the MV Tampa, in September 2001:

The Prime Minister was continuing to insist yesterday that the Tampa's human cargo not be let on Australian soil.

"It is in Australia's national interest that we draw the line on what is increasingly becoming an uncontrollable number of illegal arrivals," he said. (Allard & Crichton 2001, p.1)

John Howard's appeal to the national interest was counter-posed to an appeal from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mary Robinson who said the asylum-seekers (human cargo!) should be allowed to land in Australia. The conflict, playing across the *Herald's* front-page was a direct struggle for the emotional attitudes of Australians:

"I make an appeal to the Australian people - to look into their own hearts and to have a humanitarian and human rights approach to this," [Mary Robinson]...

But Mr Howard retorted:

"Australians have looked into their hearts far more genuinely than many other countries." (Allard & Crichton 2001, p.1)

Australian Nationalism and popular consciousness

Is it true, as cynics have long suggested, that Australian tolerance is only skin deep, and that beneath the skin, Australia is viscerally xenophobic? (Horne 2002, p.4)

This was Donald Horne in the Australia Day 2002 edition of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. It is a debate that has raged in the Australian media for decades. It is a question that cannot be answered, except in the affirmative, while ever Australian nationalism is the hegemonic emotional dialectic of the nation. Racism is more than skin deep, it is entrenched in the popular consciousness of Australia.

The Australian Marxist historian Humphrey McQueen lists four conditions that need to be in existence for a particular form of “nationalism” to exist. These are the four key elements of an emotional dialectic of nationalism:

?? a national *consciousness* in relation to other countries and people;

?? national *unity* around a Constitution;

?? the nation as a focus for *public loyalty*, and

?? the development of a national *character* (1984, p.4).

From late in the 19th Century, and certainly from the beginning of the 20th, Australia has satisfied these simple conditions. Russell Ward in *The Australian Legend*, claimed that it was the pioneering Australian bushman who epitomised the national character and that out of this grew the Australian national type (Ward 1964, p.v). Ever since Ward’s book was first published in 1958 this has been hotly debated and various events - from Gallipoli to the Depression of the 1930s and even up to the cultural renaissance of the Whitlam years (1972-75) - have been suggested as the true cornerstone of the Australian legend.

As McQueen notes in *Gallipoli to Petrov* (1984), the Australian ruling class has always had an ambivalent attitude towards the need for a strong national State machine. Since Federation, Australian Capital has needed central government “to rebuff external enemies, to put down internal rebellion, to provide facilities for nation-wide economic growth, and to settle intra-capitalist disputes.” At the same time the bourgeoisie supported the contradictory notion of “States’ Rights” in opposition to the central Government because “they have feared that these very powers might be used against them” (McQueen 1984, p.9).

At the same time, for the Nation-State it is precisely the need to defend ‘national interests’ against external ‘threats’ and other States that leads to foreign policy conflict because “the closer nations are drawn together, the greater the interaction of interests and the greater the risk of conflict”:

But whatever the underlying reasons, conflict between states erupts when there is a clash of interests, and insofar as national interests are represented by foreign policies, we are in practice talking about the clash of foreign policies. (PalFREEMAN 1998, p.xiii)

The ideological bias and emotional dialectic in the Palfreeman model of the national interest becomes clear in the following passage, but it is really no more than the ‘orthodoxy’ among conservative intellectuals:

We may perhaps picture the international system as a giant marketplace where the buyers and sellers (the Nation-States) are bargaining with each other for more security, more resources and more recognition. Naturally, the gross inequalities in the relative power of the buyers and sellers is reflected in the strengths and weaknesses of each state’s bargaining power in the marketplace.
(Palfreeman 1998, p.xiii)

Naturally? There is nothing ‘natural’ about this process that is a construct of human intelligence constrained by the dominant economic forces and relations of production. The idea of nations competing in some benign ‘marketplace’ is the ideological sugar on the pill of naked class interest. The emotional dialectic of the liberal-democratic free market is nonsense when applied to the foreign policy of Nation-States. Less sanguine ideologues would echo the view of the late diplomat and author Malcolm Booker, who, in his ‘pull-no-punches’⁴³ style, called his treatise on Australian foreign policy *The Last Domino*, believed that the “realities of international politics should be viewed steadily and unsentimentally” (1976, p.9).

Kerry Stokes – bourgeois nationalist

In the second of his 1994 Boyer Lectures for the ABC, media proprietor, Kerry Stokes, offers a more liberal, but still orthodox, definition of the Australian national interest aligned to the emotional dialectic of an idealised Australian ‘community’:

...the national interest begins and ends with the community. It is the people who must be the focal point of all national initiatives. If you imagine an inverted pyramid, this is the point on which the whole

⁴³ Veteran political correspondent Alan Ramsey wrote a sympathetic obituary when Malcolm Booker died in 1998 in which it was made clear that Booker was ‘his own man’ to the end (Ramsey 1998a).

structure rests as it grows to support the suburbs, cities, states and ultimately, at its widest point, the nation itself. Anything which brings greater cohesiveness to the community is of national benefit; anything which divides us is against our interests as a nation. (Stokes 1994a pp.16-17)

Stokes' definition can be characterised as the small 'I' liberal approach to national interest, cloaked in notions of community and social cohesion. Kerry Stokes has made himself a reputation as what Marx and Engels might have derisively called a 'bourgeois socialist'; someone in a position of authority who is "desirous of redressing social grievances, in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society" (Marx & Engels 1970, p.69). In 2001 the chairman of the Seven Network was invited to present the ABC's prestigious Andrew Olle memorial lecture on media issues in which he "called on journalists and political leaders" to raise the level of public debate. However, this was couched in very safe language, Stokes is, after all, a wealthy member of the ruling class:

One way to do this [Stokes said] was to introduce a sort of annual general meeting for politicians, similar to the one he chaired yesterday for his own Seven Network.

"I was held accountable to my shareholders... Why shouldn't we expect our elected officials to be held accountable in the same way and by the people who elected them?" (Clark 2001, p.5)

However, the pseudo-community focus of Stokes' family-oriented nationalism is a mask for his own commercial self-interest and this becomes clear when he begins talking about 'foreign' control of Australia's media:

...the problem is that once you give the power and control of media assets to foreigners you can never be quite sure who'll end up owning the rights to influence our opinions and culture (Stokes 1994b, p.29).

Stokes is not saying anything startling here. On the contrary, it would be startling were it otherwise. The *Canberra Times* proprietor and television station investor is a media capitalist, firmly in the Australian bourgeois nationalist tradition. We

might expect newswriters with a more developed sense of class-consciousness (the grey collar journalists) to be less committed to the Nation-State, though perhaps still tied to the emotional dialectic of nationalism. The 'left-nationalist' tradition has been quite strong in the socialist movement and *the Australian media*⁴⁴ at least from the time of the Eureka Stockade.

Emerging Australians Journalism and Nation c.1880-1920

The meagre resources of the colonial press in Australia were often harnessed to the service of nation building and the debates, while quaint by today's standards, were important to the readers of the day. George Muedell spoke for many in a lengthy piece in the *Melbourne Review* under the title 'Australia for the Australians':

It is natural that all new communities should begin to develop a national character after passing through the period of infancy, and according to the force of this national character do they progress...Different countries produce men of different physique, seeing that they are forced by natural laws to follow different occupations...And with bodily changes there come inevitably changes of the mind. (Muedell 1882, cited in Alomes & Jones 1991, pp.55-57)

The roots of Australian nationalism are sunk deep into the 19th Century, particularly in the last two decades as voices calling for independence from Britain became louder and more insistent (Alomes & Jones 1991). However, the emotional dialectic of early Australian nationalism was imbued with its own contradictions that do not appear to have disappeared at the beginning of the nation's third century⁴⁵. On the one hand, early Australian nationalism was

⁴⁴ Phillip Adams, who writes a weekly column in *The Australian*, is the perfect example of this tradition. Adams even sometimes trades on the fact that he was once a member of the Communist Party of Australia for a brief period.

⁴⁵ In September and October 2001 the Howard government adopted a policy of turning back refugee boats approaching the Australian coastline from Indonesia. The so-called 'Tampa' incident is briefly discussed in this chapter.

“positive, even utopian in its romantic sense of the possibilities for the young nation” (Alomes & Jones 1991, p. 74). The darker side of the nascent nationalist ideology was a deep-seated racism and a conservative longing for the security of Empire. The *commonwealth* was not to be shared by non-Britishers.

This young Australian nationalism was also fiercely male and women were relegated to the home and “had little sway in a public sphere which was monopolised by men”. Unable to vote or stand for Parliament, women had “immense difficulty in playing any kind of effective role in Australian public life” (Pearce 1998, p.4). One of Australia’s pioneering female reporters, Catherine Helen Spence wrote for almost 30 years using a succession of *noms des plumes*. She did not write under her own name until 1876 (Pearce 1998, p.5). Pearce mentions many other women who made a (sometimes precarious) living from their reporting:

While it appears that many women journalists were novelists as well, journalism offered them the steadier and more reliable income - it was never enough for affluence, but sufficient to secure a tenuous financial independence, especially if supplemented by family inheritances. (Pearce 1998, pp.6-7)

Are we still a ‘white’ Australia?

At the time of Federation, the Australian press all supported variants of a developing nationalist ideology, including its less savoury aspects such as the long-standing ‘White Australia Policy’ which was in existence from 1901 to the late 1960s. One of the first deeds of the new Australian parliament after federation was to pass legislation establishing ‘White Australia’, the *Immigration Restriction Act* (No.17 of 1901). This law did not specifically ban non-white migrants, but it imposed a language test requiring the applicant “to write out at dictation and sign in the presence of the [Immigration] officer a passage of fifty words in length in an European language directed by the officer” (cited in Alomes & Jones 1991, p.136). Support for ‘White Australia’ was fairly equal among the mainstream press and the papers of the political left, from colonial days up to at least the 1930s.

‘White Australia’ was a hegemonic emotional attitude in Australia for more than a century, driven by the dialectic of ‘Empire Nationalism’. However, the emergent working class and its political institutions did mount some opposition. Their hearts and minds were enthused by an alternative dialectic of emotions - the emerging revolutions in Russia and Europe.

**A nation in shadow:
Massacre at Gallipoli and revolution in Russia**

*During war all institutions and organs of the State and of public opinion become, directly or indirectly, weapons of warfare. This is particularly true of the press. No government carrying on a serious war will allow publications to exist on its territory which, openly or indirectly, support the enemy. Still more so in a civil war. (Leon Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism*, 1922 (Trotsky 1976, p.147)*

The great myth of Australian nationalism is the legend of the mighty Anzacs who fought, lost and (mostly) died on a lonely Turkish beach during the First World War. The last Australian ‘digger’, Charlie Mance died around the middle of 2001, a staunch pacifist for most of his life. The military debacle of Gallipoli is endearingly referred to as “the crucible in which Australian nationhood was forged” (Alomes & Jones 1991, p.163). The reality is, as always, less heroic than the myth making would allow:

Although the early rhetoric of the war concentrated on the national unity and greatness which would ensue, the reality was one of divisions, of the repression of dissent, of the internment of enemy aliens, of xenophobic prejudice against Germans (or ‘the Hun’) and of the post-war repression of communists following the Russian Revolution of 1917. (Alomes & Jones 1991, p.163)

In the first 20 years of the 20th Century a range of emergent and traditional dialectics reflected real social conflict. In Australia the rhetoric of nationalism was victorious. Gallipoli overcame Petrograd.

The Gallipoli legend became a conservative rallying call - the Returned Services League (RSL) battle cry of ‘Lest we forget’ - associated with the “noble savage

quality of the [white] bushman[,] not with socialist egalitarianism, but with loyalty to the British Empire” (Alomes & Jones 1991, p.163).

The shadow of 1917

The shadow of 1917 was cast not only across the societies which fell to communist rule. It also fell more palely over all western societies...no matter how liberal their domestic political culture...[where] the communist parties of the advanced capitalist world...[established] an illegal underground apparatus...contaminated by the grotesque political culture of Stalinism. (Manne 1994, pp.7-8)

It was in these first decades of the 20th Century that modern Australian nationalism took root in all aspects of society, under what conservative historian Robert Manne has elegantly described as the “shadow of 1917”.

This aspect of history is certainly highlighted by writers and journalists such as British newspaperman and some-time children’s author, Arthur Ransome. Ransome went to Russia in 1913, at the age of 29, to write for the liberal *Daily News* and later for the *Manchester Guardian*. He stayed for 14 years (Foot 1992, p.10). While in Russia Ransome became close friends with many of the Bolsheviks and even married Trotsky’s assistant, Evgenia Petrovna Shelepina. What he saw in Russia during the revolutionary period, “excited him so much that he became for the first and last time in his life politically committed”. Ransome was effectively ‘overcome’ by the emotional dialectic of the Russian revolution - the working class emerging onto the stage of history. It seems that Ransome’s reportage from Russia was coloured by his sudden conversion and his despatches were “greeted with contempt and fury by [a] British government” that was implacably opposed to the new Bolshevik regime. Apparently, Ransome regarded the views of the British government and the newspapers that supported it as infected with “intellectual sloth” and “gross mental indolence”. For their part, the British secret services at one stage recommended that Ransome be prosecuted as a traitor (Foot 1992, p.12). In a similar vein, American journalist John Reed was already a committed Socialist when he went to cover the Bolshevik revolution for the American socialist newspaper *The Masses*. However, respected British historian A.J.P. Taylor acknowledges: “He was too

good a journalist to write propaganda, but he made no secret of where his sympathies lay” (Taylor 1977, p.x).

The Great War was, for the most part, reported from a very patriotic perspective and the Anzac legend came into being when a dispatch from British correspondent Ashmead-Bartlett, appeared in the Melbourne *Argus* on 8 May 1915:

...The Australians rose to the occasion...Though many were shot to bits, without hope of recovery, their cheers resounded throughout the night...They were happy because they knew that they had been tried for the first time and had not been found wanting...(Cited in Bassett 1981, p.158)

This style of eulogising reportage was fairly common throughout the Great War and most correspondents of the day would gladly down play, or ignore, the bungling of the allied High Command. As Phillip Knightley notes in *The First Casualty*, most war correspondents:

...were in a position to know more than most...yet they identified themselves absolutely with the armies in the field; they protected the high command from criticism, wrote jauntily about life in the trenches, kept an inspired silence about the slaughter and allowed themselves to be absorbed by the propaganda machine. (Knightley 1975, p.65)

“Scoop”: A delicious tale

The confusion of conflict also exacts a price on ‘truth’ during war. Phillip Knightley recounts a delicious tale about Evelyn Waugh’s hilarious novel of the bungling gardening columnist William Boot mistakenly sent by the *Daily Beast* to cover a civil war in Ishmaelia. According to Knightley’s information *Scoop: A novel about journalists*, is based on an a series of incidents involving several British journalists, including the *Daily Express* correspondent O.D. Gallagher:

Gallagher told me that by the time [his copy] had been tapped out in morse to London by a telegraph operator who did not understand English it was almost unintelligible. Fleet Street foreign editors did their best to unravel it and then made up the rest, so that when the

correspondents [in Abyssinia] received clippings of their stories they were not only amazed at what emerged but [also] often unable to identify what the original story had been about. (Knightley 1997, p.111)

The editors in London knew enough to make up a quite acceptable ‘version’ of events in tune with the emotional attitudes of the newsroom, their audience and their proprietors. In *Scoop* the sheer chaos of trying to cover an unfathomable conflict in a little-known (to English readers) country is highlighted in this exchange between Boot and a local official:

An expression of extreme annoyance came over the affable, black face.

‘But your colleagues have made every arrangement. It is very difficult for my bureau if the journalists do not keep together. You see, your pass to Laku automatically cancels your permission to remain in Jacksonburg. I’m afraid Mr Boot, it will be necessary for you to go.’

‘Oh rot,’ said William. ‘For one thing there is no such place as Laku.’

‘I see you are very well informed about my country Mr Boot. I should not have thought it from the tone of your newspaper.’

William began to dislike Dr Benito.

‘Well, I’m not going. Will you be good enough to cancel the pass and renew my permission for Jacksonburg?’...

‘Very well.’ Dr Benito turned to go. Then he paused. ‘By the way, have you communicated to any of your colleagues your uncertainty about the existence of the city of Laku?’

‘Yes, but they wouldn’t listen.’

‘I suppose not. Perhaps they have more experience in their business. Good night.’ (Waugh n.d., p.123)

Waugh's clever satire puts a poor working class gardening columnist into a war zone where he is clearly out of his depth. Yet his very ineptitude is richly rewarded by the publisher of the *Daily Beast*. In a sense it didn't matter what Boot saw or reported back; the paper had a line on the war in Ishmaelia that accorded with the British interests. That Boot felt uncomfortable about this was irrelevant to the *Beast*, but it is very revealing about the nature of journalism in the inter-war years - national (imperial) interest was paramount and if necessary the editors in London would simply invent copy to ensure the *Beast* was always right. Boot was not a grey collar journalist, but his predicament is a humorous example of the emotional dialectic of nationalism at work.

*Which side are you on?
Tell me, which side are you on?*

[The] concept of an over-riding obligation to the state in time of war survived the industrial revolution. Nationalism, however, replaced the earlier imperative of survival and, largely through the emergence of a popular press, the new urban industrial class was encouraged to share in national and imperial glory. (Young & Jesser 1997, p.8)

Apart from having a basic understanding of geography, survival skills and politics (unlike the hapless Boot), the real 'test' of a war correspondent's loyalty to the emotional dialectic of liberal democracy and the Nation-State comes when s/he is asked to cover a war in which her/his country is a combatant. When a journalist is under fire the full impact of the "uneasy relationship" (Young & Jesser 1997, p.1) between the media and the military is revealed. Under these circumstances, the contradictions that characterise a newsworker's conflicting duties cannot be avoided:

...on the one hand the media's perceived duty of serving the public's right to know and, on the other, its obligation to observe the proper constraints of 'operational security' demanded by the military in Western liberal democracies. (Young & Jesser 1997, p.1-2)

We can see clearly in this idea the dialectic of the front-page is an attempt to resolve this clash of interests. The 'national interest' argument for moral, social and political cohesion is potentially at its strongest when external forces threaten

the ‘nation’. This sentiment is heightened when nations are at war and is well documented.

It is a well-rehearsed axiom that the first ‘casualty’ of war is ‘truth’. Governments move quickly, once hostilities start, to control information. In Australia, one of the first actions of the Menzies’ administration after war was declared in September 1939 was to establish a Department of Information (Barrett 1981, p.172). The main purpose of official censorship during war, apart from maintaining ‘operational security’ is to suppress material that might be “considered damaging to public morale” (Barrett 1981, p.173). The Government Censors in all allied commands did not necessarily get everything their own way and many correspondents, including the BBC’s Chester Wilmot occasionally crossed the line. However, in most circumstances, reporters knew which side they were on. In any war zone, reporters also practice a form of “self-censorship of committed journalists”, as well as being subject to “military and government censorship” (Young & Jesser 1997, p.41).

***“Hello BBC”:
Australian journalists at war 1936-1945***

...That the people are becoming distrustful of official views disseminated by press and radio is illustrated by comments made in their letters. Evidence that they are inclined to believe reports issued by the Axis propagandists in preference to that of their own is also seen...(The Commonwealth Censor 20 July 1942. Cited in Barrett 1981, p.173)

My first professional media job was as an archivist with ABC radio in Sydney. I took great delight in listening to and annotating hours and hours of historic broadcasts. Apart from the cricket tests and some contributions to the early commentary program, *Speaking Personally*, one of my favourite pastimes was listening to Chester Wilmot’s broadcasts from France following ‘D-Day’. He invariably began with the crisp phrase: “Hello BBC, this is Chester Wilmot”, I didn’t know at the time that he was one of Australia’s most eminent war correspondents.

Perhaps the most remembered Australian correspondent of World War Two, Wilmot, like his colleague and friend, Alan Moorehead, came from middle class

Melbourne. Both were sons of established reporters and both had attended private schools before starting out in journalism. George Johnston and Chester Wilmot started work at the Melbourne *Argus* on the same day in 1933 (Sekules 1999, p.13). Like Johnston and many others, Wilmot wrote up his wartime experiences in book form, including many anecdotes about serving with allied troops in famous encounters with the enemy, such as Tobruk in 1941 with equally-famous camera-man, Damien Parer. However, in reporting the war, Wilmot “did not see his role as a propagandist”. He clashed regularly with his employer - the Australian Broadcasting Commission - “who had a quite different idea of the national broadcaster’s priorities” (Sekules 1999, p.15). So began Wilmot’s uneasy alliance with the allied command structure, but it did not stop him from writing first class copy that regularly scooped his press colleagues:

So there he was, this big Australian with the small shrewd eyes and the calm collected manner of an experienced staff officer, who was able to write the news that they had all missed. (Moorehead, Mediterranean Front n.d.. Cited in Sekules 1999, p.15)

Wilmot was by all accounts a brave and resourceful journalist, but difficult to get on with. In 1941 Wilmot believed he had reliable information about corrupt behaviour by senior officers in the awarding of supply contracts. It was a story that the ABC would not broadcast, claiming it would undermine confidence in the Australian military command. Wilmot was hounded by General Blamey who, according to Sekules (1991, p.19) was implicated in the scandal. In his *War Diaries*, the poet Kenneth Slessor, himself a noted war correspondent, and Ken Inglis, in his history of the ABC, mention this incident as a factor in Wilmot’s poor treatment by Blamey. The Australian General would not accredit Wilmot to cover operations under his command in New Guinea:

The real reason for his expulsion, Wilmot believed, were that in general he had stood up for the right of correspondents to make informed criticism ... Back in Sydney, Wilmot appealed to the [Australian Broadcasting] Commission. ‘The basic freedom of correspondents in General Blamey’s command is at stake’, he declared. (Inglis, n.d.. Cited in Sekules 1999, p20, emphasis added)

What lucky break that turned out to be! After spending a few months behind a desk in the ABC's home offices, Wilmot joined the BBC and was assigned to fly with the first wave of allied gliders towed across the English Channel to the Normandy beaches on D-Day (Sekules 1991, p.22). His excited broadcast covering the liberation of Brussels a few weeks later captures the mood of the time:

...by the time we arrived every building was plastered with flags and streamers ... 'Welcome to our liberators,' 'Welcome to our Allies.' ...Thousands of women and children have made themselves special dresses in the Belgian colour - red skirts, yellow blouses and black scarves or bandanas. And these all appeared as if by magic just as the Germans left. (Wilmot n.d.. Cited in Sekules 1999, p.25)

Wilmot may have kept his private feelings to himself, but his taste for the dramatic and colourful is in keeping with the up-beat and supportive tone required by the BBC and other allied media. A cosy relationship with the 'top brass' is also revealed by Wilmot's account of the privileged access he was given to sensitive Nazi papers while researching his book *The Struggle for Europe*, which Sekules describes as "written on the scale of *War and Peace*" (1999, p.25). Despite his occasional criticism, Wilmot was always loyal to Australia's national interests during and after the war. In *The Struggle for Europe* (c.1950), Chester Wilmot offers a cogent Australian critical perspective on the looming Cold War:

*Wilmot develops his explanation of how and why the Western Allies achieved military victory but suffered political defeat. As he sets out in his preface [to *The Struggle for Europe*], 'In the process of crushing Nazi Germany and liberating Western Europe, they allowed the Soviet Union to gain control of Eastern Europe and to prevent the application there of the Atlantic Charter for which they had fought'. (Sekules 1999, p.26)*

Wilmot died tragically in a plane crash at the age of 42 so we do not know what he might have done after the war. No doubt his future with either the ABC or the BBC was assured. Chester Wilmot would, I am sure, have made a greater

contribution to news reporting over many more years, had he lived. For confirmation, one only has to recall the celebrity status enjoyed by Wilmot's contemporaries in the post-war years: George Johnston, Kenneth Slessor, Alan Moorehead and others. Another resourceful reporter, with equally good access to military secrets, was Wilfred Burchett. His post-war career was rather more 'notorious' than famous, but along with 'Petrov' it was a name most Australians would become more and more familiar with throughout the 1950s. Burchett was forced to defend himself with libel suits against his detractors who labelled him a traitor, while others lauded him as a journalist and as a political advocate of the left (Salisbury in Burchett 1981, p.v).

Unfortunately for Burchett, his North Korean and Chinese friends were deemed to be totally 'unsavoury' in terms of Australia's national interest. Indeed, they were the *enemy* in a nasty little 'hot' war and the decidedly frosty Cold War. Despite his renown as a war correspondent, Burchett lost his passport and his Australian citizenship for a time while Robert Menzies and John Gorton were in the Prime Minister's seat. In 1970 he was eventually allowed to return and landed in Sydney in the midst of a crowd divided between "fist shakers and booers...organised by the ultrarightist Citizens for Freedom movement⁴⁶," and the "hand-wavers...from trade union, student, and peace groups". He flew into Australia from Noumea accompanied by *Sunday Observer* journalist Bill Greene (Burchett 1981, p.226). In summing up his life's work in his memoir *At the barricades*, Burchett indicates he had no regrets and he also set out a set of principles that might describe a flawed model of the perfect grey collar journalist, one sitting at the proletarian end of the emotional dialectic:

Journalists are members of human society with the same rights and duties and social responsibilities as everyone else, including those of political options. Political parties, especially those devoted to changing society instead of exploiting its vagaries, need journalists dedicated to their aims. Any party to be effective must count on the loyalty and discipline of its members.

⁴⁶ A group of political refugees from behind the Iron Curtain who campaigned against the Soviet and other Stalinist regimes, but from a very conservative and pro-Western perspective.

It so happens that step by step and almost accidentally, I had achieved a sort of journalistic Nirvana, free of any built-in loyalties to governments, parties or any organisations whatsoever. My loyalty was to my own convictions and my readers. This demanded freedom from any discipline except that of getting the facts on important issues back to the sort of people likely to act—often at great self-sacrifice—on the information they received...I had become more and more conscious of my responsibilities to my readers. The point of departure is a great faith in ordinary human beings and the sane and decent way they behave when they have the true facts of the case.
(Burchett 1981, p.328)

This is a very interesting statement that contains many contradictions. His personal loyalties, despite his obvious and controversial political affiliations, were to his own world-view and to his readers. This is an open contradiction further widened by references to changing the world and informing the “sort of people likely to act”. His sentiments are in accordance with a political and emotional sympathy for the working class, but this is confused by references to more bourgeois liberal notions of responsibility to readers. As discussed in chapter 7, this represents a familiar version of the fourth estate position. However, it is Burchett’s complex relationship with the Stalinist bureaucracies of the 1950s that is crucial in the current context. While variously accused of being in the pay of the Chinese, Russians, North Koreans and Vietnamese, Burchett always retained an uneasy relationship with some of the regimes and their policies. In May 1946 he was in Czechoslovakia for the first Prague ‘spring’, he met the dissident journalist Egon Kisch and saw “smiling Czechs and Slovaks strolling along the roads lined with blossoming fruit trees”. In a passage that indicates some tension, Burchett recalls a party attended by Czech journalists and writers to celebrate the 1946 election that observers agreed had been held “in a democratic, almost gala atmosphere”:

It was the first exuberant ‘spring’ in Prague, which was later to suffer the fate of the ‘second spring’ in 1968. Almost all those in the room were later executed as ‘spies’ or traitors’. (Burchett 1981, p.133)

Burchett expresses the contradictions in the ideological sub-ensemble of grey collar journalists in relation to the key issues of his life in newspapers and politics. The next section explains the importance of the Cold War, as the dramatic backdrop for Wilfred Burchett's most important and controversial journalism. The grey collar thesis suggests that the political climate of the 1950s decisively conditioned the emotional dialectic within journalism for nearly 20 years. This was eventually changed in the mid-1960s by the unexpected rise of a new larrikin streak exemplified by *Nation Review* and *Oz* magazine from the stable of Gordon Barton (Hirst 1998).

A chilly reception: Pressing the Cold War advantage

WAR IS PEACE
FREEDOM IS SLAVERY
IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH

The Ministry of Truth contained, it was said, three thousand rooms above ground level, and corresponding ramifications below. ...[It] concerned itself with news, entertainment, education and the fine arts. ...[The other departments], in Newspeak: Minitrue, Minipax, Miniluv, and Miniplenty. ...The Ministry of Love was the really frightening one. (Orwell 1988, p.7)

In the first few pages of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Winston has recurring dreams and there is no doubt what's also in Orwell's mind at the time he wrote the novel (c.1946-49):

Winston was dreaming of his mother.

He must, he thought, have been about ten or eleven years old when his mother had disappeared...His father he remembered more vaguely...The two of them must evidently have been swallowed up in one of the first great purges of the fifties. (Orwell 1988 (1949), p.26)

Orwell was well aware of the purges in the Soviet Union under Stalin both before and after the war. In 1949 the Cold War had not yet really been named, but Mao's Red Army was on the long-march to power in China. Post-war rationing and austerity were still affecting most working people in Britain. Orwell was also

very ill and pessimistic about the prospects for revolution. On the other side of the world, was an Australian contemporary of Orwell's who made a name for himself as a war correspondent and then 'spoiled' it by openly supporting North Korea in the 1950s. Meet Wilfred Burchett, a fine grey collar journalist with one defect - his faith in Stalinism.

An early chapter of *The Shadow of 1917* is devoted to a damning critique of Wilfred Burchett, whom Manne calls an "apologist for terror and judicial murder in Stalinist Eastern Europe and [a] fighter for the communist cause in Asia" (Manne 1994, p.91). Burchett's finest moment was no doubt being the first Western correspondent to report, to a global newspaper audience, the horrors of America's unnecessary nuclear strikes against the Japanese city of Hiroshima:

Walking through those Hiroshima streets one had the feeling of having been into some death-stricken other planet. There was nothing but awful devastation and desolation. ...As I gazed upon this panorama of terrible death...I knew why the spirit of the men who signed the surrender had collapsed, and why even a nation of militarists, confronted with this awful spectacle of man-planned destruction, had lowered their flag, realising the futility of war on such terms. (Burchett 1946, n.p.. Cited in Sekules 1999, p.125)

Wilfred Burchett is perhaps the first archetypal *Australian* grey collar journalist⁴⁷ in the sense of having a well defined, if slightly skewed, sense of proletarian consciousness. He had a working class upbringing and was good with his hands. At the same time, he was almost completely self-taught in the liberal Arts and fluent in several languages. Burchett had a healthy curiosity about the Orient when most Australians were still living in fear of a 'Yellow Peril' from the north. Like Hemmingway and Orwell, Burchett went to Spain to fight with the Republicans. He didn't see any action, but moved on to work for a German travel company. While he was there he organised the escape of many Jewish people from the Nazis. After a stint in New Caledonia - the inspiration for his

⁴⁷ I must add that from what I know of Burchett's politics he was not my kind of socialist, too close to too many nasty State-Capitalist regimes, but then again, it was hard to maintain such a position in the 1950s. Both sides played for keeps.

first book, *Pacific Treasure Island* - he then returned to Australia for a short time and worked as a translator in the Department of Information. Unhappy in this menial job, he made his own way to China and began to send copy to the *Daily Express* in Fleet Street 'on spec'. He was hired by the legendary *Express* editor, Arthur Christiansen and began a sensational career that earned him accolades one minute and brickbats the next (Sekules 1999, p.121).

The Hiroshima episode - Burchett's singularly outstanding achievement in a long career - has been over-shadowed by the controversy surrounding his later life. He was a constant 'bogeyman' for the Menzies government and supported the 'wrong' side in several conflicts involving Australia and her allies. In this chapter, 'He Chose Stalin: The Case of Wilfred Burchett', Manne repeats the claim that Burchett helped North Korean officers to interrogate captured allied pilot Paul Kniss and others during the Korean War (1992, pp.56-57) and that he was, at various times in the late 1940s and after, a paid agent of both Moscow and Peking. There's no doubt his reporting, under the circumstances, was deemed not in the national interests of Australia.

Self-censorship and 'operational security'

I got the full story of the Pearl Harbour losses from Wallace Carroll, UP's London correspondent...He had much information about the incredibly careless conduct of the U.S. command in Hawaii. Naturally, none of this could be published. (Salisbury 1989, p.35)

Just like Orwell's television-eyed 'Big Brother', the all-pervasive Capitalist State has an over-riding concern for the national interest and 'operational security' during times of war. However, these same state-imposed *and self-enforced* restrictions on press freedoms are also apparent at other times, when no actual 'shooting' conflict exists.

Some reporters, such as eminent war correspondent Denis Warner, eventually attain the journalistic status of Elder Statesman and take on the role of Wise Counsel to those 'coming on'. Warner knew his limits and happily went along with the 'mainstream' political positions of the day. In his memoirs, *Wake Me if there's Trouble* (1995), Warner recounts his ascent to this position, "substantially freed from the tyranny of the daily deadline". He now had the freedom to advise

from the “opinionated” editorial pages for the conservative American magazine, the *New Republic*:

...with the splendid guideline that I should feel free to advocate policy changes that could be 20 per cent beyond the limits to be expected from responsible government at the time. The result was an editorial advocating the US recognition of mainland China, coupled with the advice that its expansionism should continue to be contained. (Warner 1995, p.286)

Tinker, tailor, journalist, spy

Denis Warner is not unique, he merely invests in the hegemonic ideologies of his age. The ties between journalists and the State, both acknowledged and clandestine, are routine. In times of conflict the state is not averse to calling on newswriters to become clandestine operatives. It's surprising how many agree to collaborate, despite their personal feelings of ambivalence about nationalism and even dislike of their own governments.

The famous American journalist and author, Martha Gellhorn, is a classic example of this contradictory consciousness embodied. She was from a middle class family in middle America and consorted with Presidents. However, throughout her life she maintained a fiercely independent and quite grey collar emotional attitude towards politics and social issues. According to her biographer, in the inter-war years, Martha Gellhorn:

...felt at home in a multicultural world and craved contact with other societies as away of informing their own. The narrowness of nationalism disturbed [her]. [She] felt they were combating deep forms of prejudice that divided the world. [She] rejected everything that seemed provincial about personal and public life. (Rollyson 2001, p.36)

As well as being a renowned writer, Martha Gellhorn was a close friend (perhaps even lover) of H.G. Wells, himself a passionate humanist and critic, she was also married to Ernest Hemmingway for many years. However, the well-known left wing politics of this famous literary couple did not stop the American State Department from asking them to provide information when they made a

professional visit to China in 1941. For some reason Gellhorn had been emotionally adopted by Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of the President and this personal connection was used to encourage the couple to “gather intelligence on the [American’s] political ally, Chiang Kai-shek” (Rollyson 2001, p.119). According to Rollyson, it would appear that Gellhorn agreed to this request:

This may be why Gellhorn also met with [Communist leader] Chou En-lai, an encounter she did not write about until nearly forty years later. (Rollyson 2001, p.119)

Such approaches to journalists are not uncommon, nor is their agreement to undertake such tasks. Phillip Knightley documents many encounters with reporter-spies on both sides of the Iron Curtain. While working for the British weekly, the *Sunday Mail* in the late 1960s, Knightley was writing about Kim Philby, a former London *Times* correspondent who had been a long-term Russian agent while also working for the British SIS. Knightley recalls how he found out some years later that the intelligence service knew in advance what the paper was going to publish.

The editor-in-chief of the Sunday Times, Denis Hamilton, had come to an agreement with the service. His need to do so was understandable.... ‘Ah’ said Hamilton as we approached each other [one day in the Times corridors], ‘here comes Philby’s public relations officer.’ He said it in a jocular manner but, sensing his unease I explained how we had got the story and its importance. He was not impressed. ‘I saw too many good men killed during the war,’ he said. ‘I’d hate it if we put anyone in danger. You see, you can’t always tell. You really ought to take advice on stories like that.’ It turned out that this is what the Sunday Times had done with the original Philby stories. (Knightley 1997, pp.225-226)

This is a classic example of how senior reporters and editors were co-opted by the intelligence services of the Western alliance during the Cold War. In the second instalment of George Johnston’s fictionalised, but barely disguised autobiography, *Clean Straw for Nothing*, the Johnston character, David Meredith, confronts this problem in 1945 on his return from China where he was

a successful war correspondent. Although Australia was not *at war* with China yet, Meredith's editor at the *Post*, Mr Brewster spiked a series of articles on the violent excesses of the Chinese Nationalists because Meredith had criticised them quite harshly:

[Brewster] *'I personally found them fascinating David. Powerful. A most revealing series. I am quite generally sorry that we shan't be able to use them. ...my decision is to do with policy. By running them we shall be playing into inimical hands.'* (p.40)

Meredith argues back and points out that Brewster himself commissioned the articles and told him "pull no punches". Brewster is unmoved and comments:

'And I am afraid, David, that in the general tone of these articles of yours it is difficult not to detect a...well, let us say a sympathy for the Chinese Communists.' (p.41)

Meredith continues to hold his ground, denying he's sympathetic to the Communist cause and saying that he thought the wartime censorship regime was over. Finally Brewster lays it on the line:

'I quite understand your professional enthusiasm. But we are a conservative newspaper and we take the conservative policy line. And the conservative view...is containment of international Communism. It is a threat David. A very real threat. And we should be betraying all our best beliefs if we were to disregard this fact.' (p.42)

Brewster goes on to mention that he had in fact checked the stories with someone from the Tiawanese Consulate in Melbourne who advised against running them, confirming for Meredith that there had been political interference at the highest level. Perhaps it was no coincidence that Johnston's fictional exchange about spiking the stories from China was written during the Vietnam conflict. *Clean Straw for Nothing* was published in 1969: another archaeological point of interest in the modern media era when a strong 'anti-Communist' twist to the national interest ideology was again brought to the fore.

A much dirtier story of journalistic intrigue during the 1960s phase Cold War, covering the Vietnam years, is related in *The Spike*, a novel by Arnaud de

Borchgrave and Robert Moss (1980), with the following lurid publisher's blurb on the cover:

Are the western media being manipulated by Soviet agents?

A story so explosive it can only be told as fiction...

A short way into the novel, two characters - the American journalist Robert Hockney and Dr Marchand - are talking about the Vietnam War and how the media might influence American public opinion:

Dr Marchand joined the conversation for the first time. "I think the press coverage will determine how long the United States goes on fighting a war it cannot possibly win...."

"It's much harder to hate an enemy with a human face than one that is just a sinister caricature," Hockney said thoughtfully....

"Some Western journalists have tried to do that," the doctor observed. "Especially that Australian Laurie Pritchard."

"Yes," said Hockney. "But Pritchard doesn't really have an audience in the United States, except among the Old Left. He doesn't get printed in the World, for example."

"You are saying that you are in a better position than Pritchard to report on the [Vietcong]," Lani interpreted for him."

"Yes," Hockney agreed. (de Borchgrave & Moss 1980, p.83-84)

It is hard to miss the reference here to Wilfred Burchett. The young, bright and ambitious Hockney is eventually seduced into working for the intelligence service and, coincidentally begins an affair with a Congressional staffer, Julia:

Unlike Hockney, she had never succumbed to the easy lure of radical chic ... Her deep commitment to congressional politics was anchored in an instinctive faith in the superiority of the American way of life over all ideologies - something she had never discussed with Hockney because she feared the phrases she might use to communicate her feelings would sound trite. (de Borchgrave & Moss 1980, p.275, emphasis added)

The writing in *The Spike* is hackneyed and the pro-Western sentiment is applied with heavy strokes of the pen. The clichéd denouement is that Hockney sees the

error of his left-leaning and libertarian ways and helps to save the day by exposing double agents in senior layers of the US government. Not only is Hockney converted to 'truth', 'justice' and the 'American way', he scoops his old paper that sacked him (p.366). In a gesture that one cannot imagine coming from Rupert Murdoch, or his fictional alter ego, Keith Townsend in *The Fourth Estate*, the great patriot and magnanimous owner of the *World*, Xenophon Nutting, wants to heap praise on his former reporter *in an editorial*:

"Sam," Nutting addressed the editorial page director, ignoring Finkel's departure, "...I want you to know that this [spy scandal] reaches as high as the Vice President...Milligan's resignation is about to be announced. ...What I would like to read [in the paper] tomorrow is an editorial that ...ought to give some kudos both to [the Russian defector] Barisov and to Bob Hockney for their courage in bringing these matters to the light of day. And I think we should also raise the question of to what extent this country's foreign policy has been steered by Soviet agents of influence since [US President] Billy Connor's election." (de Borchgrave & Moss 1980, p.368)

The proprietor, Nutting, knows best and all is right with the world and, ever the astute businessman and Statesman, he quickly gets Hockney back in harness, "You can write your own ticket, jobwise and salarywise"(p.369). To show that he is redeemed, Hockney gets to marry his all-American beauty, Julia. However, he does not get off lightly for his past sins as a pseudo-revolutionary: his former friend and mentor is caught up in the scandal and is found dead:

He had been killed by a bullet fired through the mouth...The police were still debating whether it was suicide. The FBI was convinced it was murder. (de Borchgrave & Moss 1980, p.371)

The short biography of the authors on the dust jacket of *The Spike* is almost more readable than this turgid novel. It's certainly more intriguing:

Arnaud de Borchgrave is Senior Editor and Chief Foreign Correspondent of Newsweek and Robert Moss is Editor of Foreign Report the Economist's private intelligence bulletin, and writes a widely read column for the Daily Telegraph [The Spike] is their first

novel. It is essentially based on fact, gleaned from their detailed knowledge of the media, intelligence services and international politics. Together they have had access to the testimony of all the most important KGB defectors.

I can't help wondering if they knew about Kim Philby and the alleged plot to kill General Franco during the Spanish Civil War? A story from *The Times* of London reprinted in *The Australian* (15 Nov. 2001) reveals that Philby may have been recruited by Stalin to kill Franco:

[Philby] began to establish the right-wing cover he needed to penetrate the British intelligence services. He went to write about the Spanish Civil War, carefully choosing the Nationalist [Fascist] side, and became The Times special correspondent with Franco. It was at this point that the assassination plot was hatched. (The Australian 15 November 2001, p.6)

Being a journalist-spy is a dangerous business. Being a journalist in the wrong place at the wrong time can be just as dangerous, especially if one side thinks you're spying for the other.

An uneasy alliance: Vietnam and the media

In this brief but crucial period they would also establish the skeptical standards for a new generation of war correspondents-and television as well. These were the provocative, new, adversarial standards that broke from the old and would be used to chronicle America's disaster in Vietnam and events long after. In so doing, this small group of young men would bring down upon themselves the wrath of every power structure they confronted-the White House, the Pentagon, the South Vietnamese government, the old guard of the press itself, even their own bosses. (Prochnau 1996, p.31)

As I have already mentioned, the 1960s was a time of change in journalism. The emotional attitudes of the 'New Journalists' were radicalised by social upheavals in the world around them (Hirst 1998b). Perhaps the most telling event was the war in Vietnam.

In the mid 1960s, Australia had entered the Vietnam war as an ally of the United States to protect the nation from “the theoretical possibility of a Communist invasion in years to come” (Stone 1966, p.2). When Gerald Stone wrote these words he had recently returned from a ‘tour of duty’ in Vietnam as a correspondent for Rupert Murdoch’s *Australian* newspaper. At the time, the *Australian* was opposed to Australia’s involvement in the Vietnam conflict. The fledgling paper was under what Mungo MacCallum describes as the “actual political control” of “an old Murdoch trusty”, Douglas Brass. Brass “believed from the start that Australia’s involvement was both morally wrong and ultimately against the national interest,” which at the time, was “a lonely and unpopular view among all but the extreme left” (MacCallum 2001, p.109). MacCallum himself was a “pilgrim of the left” when he joined the staff of the *Australian* in 1965. At the time though, he didn’t consider journalism as a career, more of a “useful stopgap, a way to earn a living while I decided what I really wanted to do” (2001, p.110). MacCallum was the third of his line to carry the name Mungo, and he was the unruly scion of a very establishment family. His paternal grandfather had been Chancellor of the University of Sydney, his father a leading figure at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and his maternal grandfather the irascible W.C Wentworth (MacCallum 2001). Despite this illustrious ruling class pedigree, MacCallum was most definitely a grey collar journalist throughout his long career and in the 1960s he was heavily involved in the Australian anti-war movement. MacCallum certainly displays all the attributes of a grey collar emotional attitude and the limited class-consciousness of a left-liberal.

War without Honour

In the spirit of his boss’s political attitudes, Gerald Stone quite clearly had the national interest at heart when he wrote of “the great moral burdens which the Western nations carry with them in their seemingly legitimate attempt to oppose North Vietnamese aggression” (Stone 1966, p.3). However, by the end of *War without Honour* Gerald Stone is himself doubting the wisdom of Australia’s involvement in Vietnam. In particular he is concerned by the limits the war has placed on the ‘free press’:

During 1965, almost every important news break about Australian

defence matters appeared in the British or American press before being released officially or unofficially in Australia. ... It is this kind of contempt for public opinion, particularly for critical opinion, that may ultimately present a graver threat to Australian democracy than anything which occurs in South Vietnam (Stone 1966, pp.152-153).

Gerald Stone's ambiguous emotional attitude towards Vietnam is a good example of a reporter's uncertainties when faced with a dominant ideology in conflict with individual beliefs and journalistic rigour. Stone is at pains to stress the "seemingly" just nature of the Western alliance's war against Communism, but it produces, according to Stone, "some obviously unjust results" (1966, p.153).

Around the same time that Gerald Stone was writing *War without Honour*, George Johnston's journalist wife and collaborator, Charmian Clift was writing a weekly column for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and she too displayed evidence of a contradictory and ambiguous relationship with Australian policy towards Vietnam. Sharyn Pearce in her fascinating book on Australian women newswriters, *Shameless Scribblers* (1998), says Charmian Clift was an "ardent nationalist" (p.159) at least in the cultural terms of 1960s Australia, but in an ambiguous way. "She was now both participant and outsider," (p.159) having recently returned to Australia after more than a decade abroad. In several of her *SMH* columns Clift expressed opposition to the Vietnam war and conscription voicing her anger:

...openly, [and] unfazed by the fact that the Sydney Morning Herald, together with a majority of Australia's newspapers, was solidly behind Australia's military involvement. As always she preferred to see Australia make its own way in the world, without riding on the flying coat-tails of the Great Powers. (Pearce 1998, p.166)

In a column discussing the case of draft resister Simon Townsend, Clift declared that she was not a pacifist, or a conscientious objector herself, but she acknowledged the bravery of those who would "defy the whole panoply and majesty of authority of the law...out of deeply held conviction" (Clift 2001a, p.292). In 'A new generation of Protestants' Clift defends anti-war protestors and

attacks the arrogance of leaders like NSW Premier Robin Askin. She describes Askin as a paternalistic figure who is out of touch with the aspirations of his ‘children’:

You are being dismissive, dear papa, without any real thought about what you are dismissing. And that’s not really wise, papa, because there are forces stirring in this world - oh, surly if you will, but intelligent forces, angry forces, frustrated forces, and oh so powerful forces, papa, that might rock you out of your complacency. And quite soon too. (Clift 2001b, p.305)

Charmian Clift died in July 1969 and is not mentioned in Anne Summers’ autobiography, *Ducks on the Pond* (Summers 1999), and perhaps they did not cross paths. However, Summers would perhaps have seen Clift’s columns in the *SMH*, or Melbourne *Herald*. Like Mungo MacCallum, both Clift and Summers exhibited grey collar tendencies in their journalism. Anne Summers freelanced for the Fairfax press in the early 1970s and like MacCallum was active in the anti-war movement. For Summers and her contemporaries the war’s escalation following the 1968 Tet offensive “marked the end of the old world and the beginning of an electrifying, but far more frightening era [and] ...the beginning of the end for the United States in Vietnam” (Summers 1999, p.225).

During this period Summers was a self-described Marxist and radical and became a founding member of the Women’s Liberation Movement in Australia:

In 1970 I had no idea just how subversive the ideas of women’s liberation would turn out to be...we were from the left, we called ourselves Marxists, and we all had husbands or boyfriends who shared our politics...The issues we initially identified were straightforward ones: employment, education, fertility control, sex-role socialisation. (Summers 1999, p.259)

However, by 1973 Summers was regarding herself as a feminist, and “was no longer calling myself a socialist, let alone a Marxist, but I retained a romantic hankering for revolution” (1999, p.279). Tellingly, Summers had renounced revolutionary politics in favour of reformism. This began her long association

with the Labor Party and with the bureaucracy and her “hankering for revolution” meant:

Not the defeat of the capitalist state, however, but a more fundamental form of insurrection - a total transformation of relations between what were now, as far as I was concerned, warring sexes. (Summers 1999, pp.279-280)

In 1971, when she arrived in Sydney from Adelaide, Summers “went to all the newspapers and asked for part-time work, and came nail-bitingly close to being given a column by the *Australian*”. She didn’t get it, but did manage to freelance for the *National Times* and the *Bulletin* (Summers 1999, p.290). It wasn’t until her best-selling book, *Damned Whores and God’s Police*, was published in 1974 that Anne Summers began her formal career in journalism - eventually she rose to be editor (and co-owner) of the American *Ms* magazine, a pioneer in the field of feminist women’s magazines - so her world view was well established by the time she joined the staff of the *National Times*. There’s no doubt that Summers was a grey collar journalist, though she lost her youthful ‘fire’ and became independently comfortable. In January 2002 Anne Summers is being feted as a Women’s Master of Business and is on the lucrative conference speaking circuit. Her story demonstrates that the category of grey collar is not very exclusive, hard to get into, or a necessarily permanent state of being.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the ‘best and the brightest’ of a generation of grey collar newswriters picked up on the emotional dialectic of an emerging social force - the ‘counter-culture’ and the ‘new left’. Unfortunately, these movements were only loosely tied into the political organisation of the working class and ‘traditional’ left politics were still dominated by union bureaucrats and Stalinists who were unable to hold the young radicals to a solidly Marxist line⁴⁸. In the end a generation of journalists (typified by Anne Summers and Mungo MacCallum) was buffeted by the clashing of ideologies and unable to maintain a solid commitment to class-consciousness.

⁴⁸ This is well documented by Tom O’Lincoln in his history of the Communist Part of Australia, *Into the Mainstream* (1985) particularly chapter 7: “Left Turn, Right Turn: The Party in the Seventies”.

Flack Jackets & Satellite Phones: Postmodern journalism's war on terrorism

'How do I respond when I see that in some Islamic countries there is vitriolic hatred of America? I'll tell you how I respond: I'm amazed. I just can't believe it because I know how good we are. George W. Bush, c.12 October 2001. Cited in Alcorn 2001)

Foreign correspondents are always operating on someone else's turf, subject to rules that aren't their own - indeed, subject to rules they often know nothing about. They are strangers in a strange land.
(Nelson, 2001, p.27)

This is the emotional dialectic of war in our times. President George "Dubya" Bush cannot believe that anyone could hate the United States of America so much that they could launch deadly attacks against the symbols of America's strength and freedom - the twin towers of New York's World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, home of America's military leadership in Washington DC. Journalism's war on terrorism began late in the morning of 11 September 2001 (New York time) when it became clear that it had not been an accident when a hijacked United Airlines passenger jet torpedoed into the WTC tower. Less than 45 minutes later, as horrified New Yorkers panicked, another jet speared into the second tower and within an hour they had both come crashing down. A third hijacked jet crashed into the Pentagon, a fourth went down in Pennsylvania. The immediate reaction was that these acts of terror were the work of men closely aligned to Osama bin Laden, a Saudi fundamentalist with a grudge against the United States.

A few days later, as rescue workers continued their search of 'Ground Zero', for that is what Manhattan's downtown had become, the President of the United States quickly dubbed this outrageous terrorist attack the start of the "first war of the 21st Century". The Networks soon caught up.

At a media conference, during the October air strikes to 'soften up' Taliban troops for a possible future ground assault by 'Special Forces', George Bush revealed - in the eyes of some - that he still didn't get it:

If the President does not understand Muslim anger, or will not

discuss it openly with the American people, where will his war against “evildoers” end up? (Alcorn 2001)

The Republican Mayor of New York, Rudolph Giuliani was helping Bush sell his simple message and rejected a donation of \$10 million for the city, offered by a member of the Saudi Royal Family. Why? Because Prince Alwaleed bin Talal called for the US to adopt a more balanced approach to the whole Middle East:

“Our Palestinian brethren continue to be slaughtered at the hands of Israelis while the world turns the other cheek.” (Cited in Alcorn 2001, p.28)

Gay Alcorn’s piece in the *Herald* (13-14 October), ‘Bush whips up a desert storm’, highlights that some American analysts believe “the US has a profound public relations problem in the Middle East that it is failing to address.” The article indicates that cracks had begun to appear in the united front Bush had hoped to establish against ‘terror networks’. The American President’s staunchest ally, Britain’s Labour Prime Minister, Tony Blair had recently visited the Middle East where, according to Alcorn, he “noted the same problem”. The story quotes Blair on the propaganda value of some modern global ‘spin-doctoring’:

“One thing becoming increasingly clear to me is the need to upgrade our media and public opinion operations in the Arab and Muslim world” (Cited in Alcorn 2001, p.28)

***An emotional response to terror:
The dialectic of the front-page***

The *Herald* article clearly contains the sense that there is a crisis of confidence among the policy elites over how to deal with the next phases of their campaign. She reports that British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, “denies a split with the US over widening the military campaign beyond Afghanistan, which he said was ‘not on the agenda at present’” (Alcorn 2001). There may not be a “split” yet, but the Australian press carries the story. Certainly there’s a split in the ranks of the media between those who are firmly behind the United States and its allies and those who dare to question the motives of those who wage ‘war on terror’ (Blair

2001). Among the columnists who count in newspapers and newsmagazines, a virtual war of opinion has broken out:

The September 11 terrorist attacks...have caused deep divides where once there were mere differences of opinion. (Blair 2001, p.12)

Blair's story is full of quotes from columnists of both 'left' and 'right' who dump on each other with abandon, including incidents involving well-known Australian journalists:

Miranda Devine's SMH column of September 13 - which included the line "We want that satisfying vengeance we used to get from our TV screens at the end of the last century... - prompted a hostile email from SMH TV writer Ruth Ritchie: "I just want you to now that I find your opinions and your ignorance terrifying". (Blair 2001, p.13)

Newswriters who might consider themselves on the 'left' have also disagreed with 'fellow travellers', such is the confusion and emotion generated by September 11 (Blair 2001). For others, such as Peter Eisner, the managing director of the US Centre for Public Integrity, the public questioning of American policy and patriotism, though surprising, is a good thing:

"There's been an immediate response [to September 11] that this civilisation of ours is hated in some quarters and people across a broad spectrum want to know why....And that's very positive."(Peter Eisner, cited in Dodd 2001, p.12)

Why is there such division in the ranks of the media over this conflict? Phillip Knightley believes that modern warfare - from the Falklands, the Balkans and the Gulf War of 1990-91 - has altered the bounds of what the news media *can* and *will* do and "no government can automatically assume that the media will be on side" (Knightley 2001, p.37). He adds that journalists and editors "cannot be coerced" and the media "has to be seduced or intimidated into self-censorship" (Knightley 2001, p.37). Just exactly where the distinction lies between coercion and intimidation I don't know, but the general point is correct. That is why right-wing columnists were so quick to jump on any criticism of the United States and attempted to silence those who questioned the legitimacy of the 'war on terror',

or who might suggest that perhaps, just *perhaps*, the imperialist behaviour of the United States should be challenged. We must be grateful that grey collar journalists like Phillip Knightley won't be easily silenced. Knightley had the courage to write that the "real reason" for the US, British and Australian governments wanting to "control the flow of news" about the war is that images of civilian deaths would "shake public support" for the 'war on terror'. As always, the political and ideological battle on the home front cannot be neglected:

An attack led by two powerful industrial nations against a Third World agricultural one, already reduced to ruin and in the grip of a famine, was never going to be an easy [idea] to sell. (Knightley 2001, p.37)

The persuasive (seducing) actions of governments are clear in exhortations from Washington and London that the media not report statements from al Qaeda (the alleged terrorist ring behind the September 11 attacks) because they are "inflammatory propaganda and might contain coded messages to terrorists" (Jurkowitz 2001, p.26). If this wasn't so sad it would be funny. While these games were being played in Washington and London, far behind the allied 'lines' in the 'war on terror', closer to the action things were still under quite tight control. Only approved pictures were released to the media and the faces of allied troops were pixilated out to conceal the identity of Special Forces troops (Jackson 2001, p.12-13). Knightley is right that self-censorship is rife in the 'war on terror'. A senior CNN bureau chief is quoted as saying his network would be "very conscious" of operational issues and would pull stories, "if asked by authorities and if presented with information" that it might endanger lives (Cited in Jackson 2001, p.13).

Despite attempts to seduce and cajole them, today's news reporters have the editorial freedom, the space and the ability to illustrate the complexities and differences of opinion in the allied ranks in a way that Chester Wilmot never could in his radio broadcasts. Journalists like Gaye Alcorn can report the confusing and high-stakes politics of the war, not just the battlefield 'shoot 'em up'. This modern phenomenon is well explained in an excellent study of the American media's fraught relationship with the war in Vietnam (Hallin 1986;

1994). Daniel Hallin explains how good journalists, reporting from the front lines *and from the corridors of power*, can take advantage of conflict among the elites over how to manage geo-political strategy and tactics. This leads to incisive analysis and open discussion of, otherwise secret, policy disagreements:

...the behaviour of the media is closely tied to the degree of consensus among political elites: when consensus is strong, the media play a relatively passive role and generally reinforce official power to manage public opinion. When political elites are divided, on the other hand, the media become more active, more diverse in the points of view they represent, and more difficult to manage. (Hallin 1994, 11)

If Hallin is right and the media becomes more difficult to manage during a crisis or conflict, one has to wonder what the reading, listening and viewing public make of the many and conflicting messages they absorb.

***The war against terrorism will
(unfortunately) be televised***

Much has been made of the fact that the drama of 11 September 2001 unfolded on television screens around the world - the 'first war of the 21st Century' began live on CNN, CBS, ABC. Hundreds of global television networks relayed the American reportage around the clock for several days until they could scramble their own crews into place. Not for the first time in a modern war, 'reality' seemed to be one step behind the fictional world of Hollywood:

It's this sense of hyper-reality - of a terror that has walked off our cinema screens - which compounds the nightmarish quality of these acts. (Lumby 2001, p.49)

Catharine Lumby is an academic and media commentator who popularises the ideas of Australia's small, but influential, postmodernist intelligentsia. In her semi-regular *Bulletin* column a few weeks after the 'war on terror' began (2 October), Lumby argued that it is America's cultural domination of the world, not military superiority, "that is the true symbol of American global power" (Lumby 2001, p.49). There is no denying the huge symbolic power of the American entertainment industry, but surely American military power is more

lethal - no one has ever died from an overdose of American popular culture (except perhaps Elvis Presley).

However, the propaganda battle had a global dimension: America's 'public enemy number one', Osama bin Laden scored a media coup with the release of a video to Qatar-based satellite TV network al-Jazeera, in which he claimed to be "a freedom fighter for Iraqi children, displaced Palestinians and Islam" (Eccleston 2001).

In *Virtual Geography*, McKenzie Wark (1994) lays the argument for a world over-run with media 'vectors' which simultaneously transmit and receive messages to many points around the globe. This is illustrated by reference to a series of events, including the Gulf War of 1990-91:

The site of the event also shifted from time to time. Did the Gulf war take place in Kuwait, Baghdad, or Washington? Was the site [of the conflict] the Middle East or the whole globe? ...Events then, are a product of competing technologies that cross borders with impunity.

(Wark 1994, p.21-22)

From September 11 2001 the events unfolded in uncanny similarity to the 1991 Gulf War. Not only had the hijackers turned American technology against itself with devastating effect, their erstwhile masters had turned the tables on the big TV Networks with a low-power satellite transmission. The US military strategy became "get rid of the Taliban which has hosted [bin Laden's network] al-Qa'ida". Just as importantly the war is "also being fought on American soil" (Eccleston 2001).

The conflict also threatened to extend to other countries, the *Australian* (11 October 2001, p.2) reported "extraordinary comments" by a London-based 'Islamic militant', Abdul Rehman Saleem, "spokesman for the fundamentalist group al-Muhajiroun," calling for the assassination of PM Tony Blair. The article, reprinted without a byline from the *London Times*, quotes Saleem defending his choice of target:

"What it means is that if any Muslim wants to assassinate [Blair], wants to get rid of him, I am not going to shed any tears for him and from the Islamic point of view this person is not going to be

chastised, this person is not going to be punished for that act, this person will be praised.” (Cited in the *Australian* 11 October 2001, p.2)

One can only speculate about the alarming effect this story would have on the populace of London, as they read the *Times* with their tea and toast. Would they have spared a moment’s thought for Winston, rearranging the *Times* of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in his mundane and ultimately pointless news production and sub-editing job at Minitrue?

The messages he had received referred to articles or news items which for one reason or another it was thought necessary to alter, or, as the official phrase had it, to rectify. (Orwell 1988, p.34)

In the same week as the *Times* reported threats against Tony Blair in *England*, one of the *Australian*’s senior political writers, Greg Sheridan also brings the message that the threat of terrorist attack is very real in Australia’s immediate sphere of influence, South-East Asia, under a bold caps page header...

‘WAR ON TERROR’

and a photo-dinkus:

‘GREG SHERIDAN AUSTRALIAN ANGLE’

The *Australian*’s senior writer begins an essay on the threats to Australian security posed by terrorist groups in the Asia-Pacific region and “South-East Asia” with “a wake-up call for Australia”:

Al-Qa ida terrorists who have been involved in terrorist outrages in the US have also spent extensive periods in South-East Asia. These revelations pose a substantial diplomatic, political and military challenge for Australia. (Sheridan 2001a)

Greg Sheridan will no doubt one day be a member of Denis Warner’s ‘club’, he is surely within ‘20 per cent’ of what the Australian government is thinking with his gratuitous advice. “The diplomatic and political lessons for Australia are clear,” he writes with comfort. The solutions elegantly simple: “the closest possible political and diplomatic engagement” and searching for “ways that

outsiders can help, most particularly through the provision of intelligence, training and equipment". In short, support for the current strategy that Canberra and Australia's military elite are already undertaking in the wake of the East Timor experience and other 'trial' runs at the new style of 21st Century 'limited' war. In Sheridan's terms the war on terror is 'just' because 'we' are protecting a way of life - the emotional dialectic of the liberal market economy *and* 'world peace'!

How the Telegraph made us a target for terrorists

Greg Sheridan's dire prediction of Australia becoming a 'target for terrorists' was confirmed by the *Daily Telegraph* on 2 November 2001 with a front-pager designed to extract the maximum patriotic response from readers:

JIHAD DECLARED ON AUSTRALIA

This disturbing headline was prompted by comments made by the Taliban Ambassador to Pakistan during a media conference *in response to a direct question*, though in the opening paragraph the sequencing of comments is reversed for greater effect:

Afghanistan's Taliban Islamic militia has declared a jihad, or holy war, against Australia.

The Taliban...singled out Australia for special mention for the first time yesterday. (McPhedran 2001, p.1)

The implication of this phrasing is that the Taliban *announced* a jihad against Australia specifically. However, further down in the copy it's clear that in fact the Ambassador was responding to a direct question:

Asked if that included Australians in Australia he replied:

"Yes, yes, yes, this is clear." (McPhedran 2001, p.1)

It's clear that the Ambassador was *invited* by the media to single out Australia (probably by an Australian journalist, perhaps even McPhedran) and would more than likely not have done so unless asked. Prime Minister John Howard is reported to have responded by saying Australia should not ignore this new

information, “but we shouldn’t overreact”. Advice that the *Telegraph* chose to ignore.

This ‘jihad against Australia theme’ was resurrected on a slow news Sunday in mid January 2002. Fifteen men of what can only be fairly described as ‘Islamic’ appearance were arrested in Singapore for an alleged plot to “blow up the Australian High Commission with a truck bomb as part of a series of follow-up attacks to September 11” (Kearney 2002a, p.1). Of course this begs the question if there were to be “follow up” attacks, why had they not occurred by the 13th of January 2002, some three months later? The timing of the release of this story, to make the Sunday tabloids allowed the *Sunday Telegraph* to once again badge its front page “War against Terror” and to reach back into the sack of emotive headlines:

“KILLERS TARGET
OUR DIPLOMATS”

The source for this front-page splash (Kearney 2002a) was most obviously the intelligence community and the language of the report makes it clear that the arrested men are dangerous. They lived in Singapore “parading as ordinary citizens”; many “had formal military training” (so do most Americans, Swiss and Israelis because of compulsory military service for all males) and suspiciously, they “hid their true intent from their families” (Kearney 2002b, p.2). The language in Kearney’s pieces for the *Sunday Telegraph* leaves no room for doubt in the reader’s mind: these men are ‘evil-doers’ in Bushspeak and thank God the authorities were able to catch them before it was too late. What we see in this piece, and in most coverage of the ‘war on terror’ is the closing down of oppositional spaces. There’s no room for dissent and, in any case, how could any ‘right-thinking’ person disagree. After all, *we* must protect *our* diplomats. There can be no other interest outside the nation’s interest.

A month after the attacks on New York and Washington, and one week into the air strikes against Afghan targets, Roy Eccleston’s analysis, headlined ‘Enemy on target in battle of the mind’ (*The Australian* 11 October), ends with a chilling reminder of previous campaigns:

As in the Cold War, Americans feel threatened. Keeping the

[American] public committed and patient over the longer term, especially in the face of any new terrorism, will itself be a battle unlike any the US has fought. (Eccleston 2001)

For the postmodern mind, the problem with traditional methods of analysis - like that employed by Roy Eccleston and other modern reporters - is that they cannot cope with the complexities of the postmodern *Zietgiest*. McKenzie Wark, for example, argues in his book on global media events, *Virtual Geography*, that “the very impertinence of an event frequently derives from its un-interpretability, from its resistance to existing narrative frameworks” (1994, p.27). But, somehow, the audience at the receiving end of the signal does make sense of events, usually in a narrative framework supplied by the media and one that supports the interest of the sender:

The mobilization of the population of the nation requires a national co-ordination of the vector and its narrative forms. As the management of empire becomes an increasingly global affair in an increasingly integrated global economy, the vectors reach out into international media spaces, searching for narrative tactics which can mobilize the still nationally and regionally distinct territories and populations. (Wark 1994, p.32)

In a convoluted way, Wark is agreeing with Eccleston. He is recognising that the inherent contradiction between a global capitalist economy and a population divided along national (racial or ethnic) lines is just as strong in a postmodern world as it was in the period of modernity.

In her 2 October *Bulletin* piece, ‘Hegemony over heels’, Catharine Lumby comments on the Gulf War of 1991, “infamously, the first to be fought out live on CNN”, which became for many “gripping entertainment” as TV audiences were enthralled by “cameras on the nose cones of smart bombs...just like computer games. ...There was little to remind us of the suffering the US and its allies were inflicting on the ground” (Lumby 2001).

Lumby notes that the effect of this was, as we might expect, to build support for the US coalition against Saddam Hussein. What television audiences didn’t see very much of was the devastation and suffering endured by ordinary Iraqis. The

only real taste of this was provided by two incidents - the death of hundreds of civilians in a Baghdad bunker and the charred bodies of fleeing Iraqi soldiers incinerated by napalm on the road from Basra. The first incident was dismissed as Iraqi propaganda (unlike what Western audiences were subject to 24 hours a day); the second came too late to have much impact on public opinion in the combatant countries.

Lumby's final point about 11 September is that the "terrorists" have now managed to match it in the mass media stakes and that terrorism is now a tool of cultural politics:

The impact of these attacks cannot be calculated merely in human lives - as terrible as the toll is. At the heart of these attacks is a kind of cultural coup - a co-option and contamination of the very tools the US uses to assert global authority. (Lumby 2001, p.49)

Semantics aside, the media is not a neutral transmitter of ideas and events. Everything is delivered neatly packaged with signals and instructions to assist the reader, listener, or viewer to decode the message in a politically and culturally appropriate way. That is, coded to resonate with the hegemonic emotional dialectic. How can it be 'neutral' when the media is constantly "playing these terrible images over and over, like a horror movie with no ending" (Lumby 2001, p.49). In my opinion, what Lumby is failing to recognise is that the American and Western media were working hard to establish the political conditions for public acceptance of punishment and revenge. This is clearly what the United States of America sought to exact on Osama Bin Laden, the Taliban and the people of Afghanistan - with the help of Britain, Australia and several European nations.

***"Scoop" revisited:
A strange and dusty land***

Greg Sheridan is reporting from the physical and intellectual safety of a desk in Sydney or Melbourne, but the situation is much less structured for correspondents in the field. Young and Jesser (1997, p.14-16) discuss how smaller, lighter and faster digital technology has "largely made the reporter independent of the military," which "limits even further the ability of the military

to block transmissions through electronic jamming.” They conclude with a blunt assessment:

The independence and mobility conferred by such systems restricts field censorship to physical sanction. This was demonstrated during the Gulf War [1991], when [American reporter] Peter Arnett used direct satellite telephone voice communications to report from [the Iraqi capital] Baghdad. (Young & Jesser 1997, p.15)

However, the latest and greatest technology can also cause headaches for the reporters, just as slow and only semi-literate (in English) telegraph operators were to William Boot and his colleagues in *Scoop*. Unlike Boot who was given a boat-load of useless equipment when he went to Ishmaelia, today’s war correspondents travel ‘lightly’, but they’re still vulnerable to ‘incomprehensible’ local customs. The following episode appeared in the *SMH* (13-14 October) under the ‘standard issue’ page header

“WAR ON TERRORISM”

and the simple column marker

“A REPORTER’S JOURNEY”

then the headline:

“Guns and technology collide in a strange and dusty land”

Late one recent evening “in this dusty village 70 kilometres north of the Afghan capital Kabul” (not unlike Ishmaelia without the jungle) our intrepid correspondent Nelson experiences brutal ‘culture shock’. Walking between two compounds he was “surrounded by eight bearded men”.

When I shifted again the click-click of safety catches and the slam of gun bolts rang out. I didn’t move again.

I told myself this made no sense. After all, these mujahideen are part of the anti-Taliban opposition, which desperately wants US support...I am an American...Messing with me isn’t going to do your cause any good. So put the guns away and let me go home. (Nelson 2001)

Despite thinking he's on their side, Nelson finds he is to be taken away for questioning, "one of the men yanked my hands behind my back and bound them with a tight scarf". Hopeless, he recalls: "journalists have been shot and killed in circumstances far less charged than in Afghanistan today." The interrogation takes place in a small room and Nelson quickly realises his answers to their questions were just as incomprehensible to his questioners as 'Dubya' being told that someone just might hate God's own country. It dawns on Nelson that his captors were interested in why, "three times in the last hour I had trekked from my room...less than a kilometre away to the compound...where I was now tied up." The answer highlights the emotional and ideological gulf across which the 'war on terrorism' was fought:

I had prevailed on a colleague staying in the compound to send my story with his satellite phone. ...As I explained this [to my captors] ...their suspicious stares betrayed the obvious. They had not a clue what I was talking about. My attempt to explain computer technology to them was ludicrous, for their technical expertise was probably limited to the moving parts of their Kalashnikovs. (Nelson 2001, p.27)

A little presumptuous? *Indeed*. Nelson's captors could have any number of skills he couldn't possibly dream of: how to survive in Afghanistan's harsh winter, where to find water in a desert, how to keep a tractor going when there are no spare parts and no mechanics for hundreds of kilometres in any direction. After recounting this episode, which is later downgraded to a "misunderstanding", Nelson reports on his daily rituals and those of a hundred other foreign correspondents. Like the Western soldiers and pilots waging the 'war on terrorism', the reporters are "operating on the same side of a yawning cultural, political and technological divide" (2001, p.27) that separates Afghanistan from the 'civilized' world:

After all, it was paper box cutters and four civilian airliners - not multi-billion dollar weapons - that turned America's world upside down a month ago. (Nelson 2001, p.27)

The great divide between the Islamist world - of which Afghanistan is one small part - and the capital 'w' West is also apparent on the 'home' front. On the one hand, there are respected reporters, such as John Pilger, who present arguments for the link between the global economy of late capitalism and systematic and massive abuses of global civil rights. Pilger's work always begins with the compelling critique that "economic globalisation is but the latest phase of colonial domination of the weak by the powerful" (Cromwell c. July 2001, n.p.).

The grumpy old man of Australian journalism

At the other extreme sit professional right-wing ranters, such as *SMH* stalwart, P.P. 'Paddy' McGuinness. The 'grumpy old man' of Australian journalism. McGuinness still calls himself a "libertarian", though any resemblance to the true libertarians of the anarchic Sydney 'Push' (see Summers 2000) has long since vanished under gallons of bile and lard:

...socialism and liberty cannot go together...Political libertarianism must take account of the fact that clear limits to liberty are sometimes necessary, even if to be deplored....While libertarianism and a free market are always to be preferred to any conceivable alternatives, they need to be modified in practical terms by a degree of regulation and well-designed welfare measures, but not taken so far as to destroy productive capacity...rather than opening a society up to those who would destroy its freedom. (McGuinness 2001)

On a quick reckoning this would no doubt be within 20 per cent of current Australian government policy. It could just as easily have been the then arch-Tory Employment Minister Tony Abbott or any one of Howard's parsimonious frontbench.

Also in the week of Greg Sheridan's useful advice (6-13 October 2001), McGuinness, lets loose against an amorphous 'Left' that is supposedly splintering in the face of 'Dubya's' resolute defence of freedom and Prime Minister Howard's unwavering support for a military solution:

In the wake of the terrorist atrocities in the United States, the crumbling of the Left consensus continues...while the usual suspects, especially in the media...claimed that fanaticism and poverty in the

Third World were the fault of the US and of globalisation ... [others] show that the centre of the Left consensus cannot hold - things are falling apart...As I pointed out in an earlier column, the crumbling of the Left consensus in intellectual terms (though not where the general intellectual level is low, as in the ABC) ...[is accompanied by] the kind of massive ignorance, dogmatism and disrespect for either evidence or rational argument which categorises most of the modern Left, in Australia and elsewhere. (McGuinness 2001)

Someone, somewhere once described McGuinness as a troglodyte - that's harsh on troglodytes. He is wilfully ignorant and deliberately distorts the views of his opponents. If American imperialism and global capitalism are not responsible for the collapse of the 'Third World' then what is? Even the term 'Third World' betrays how out of touch McGuinness is. Someone should tell sad old Paddy that the debate's moved on from the 1970s. Globalisation is real and the consequences do impact on the lives of real people, even if they don't buy Saturday's *Herald* just to marvel at Paddy's consistent and erudite commonsense.

Postmodern Nationalism

If the French Revolution was the cradle of the 'old' nationalism and the birthplace of a free (bourgeois) press, then 'post-colonial' Australia, represents, for some, a 'new' and dynamic form of nationalism and a postmodern revival of the Fourth Estate (Schultz 1998; Lumby 1999). For McKenzie Wark postmodern nationalism is a virtual certainty:

I want to oppose to both rationalism and conservatism the idea of the virtual – the notion that there is the potential to make things otherwise – not through an abstract plan imposed by experts, but through the conversation that is Australia, that questions and shapes each and every one of its institutions, bit by bit. (Wark 1997, p.xviii)

But is the notion of the nation matched by the reality? Postmodern cultural theorists in Australia are plugging for a 'new' nationalism: "the push for the

republic [in the 1990s⁴⁹] has been understood as the natural outcome of what is customarily seen as a decade of revived Australian nationalism” (Turner 1994, p.3). Catharine Lumby suggests that the postmodern media provide “a kind of virtual map” to this new Australia. As the “foundation of our public conversation”, Lumby writes, the media can some times seem to make about as much sense as “a Tower of Babel”. However, at the same time it “also offers moments of unexpected convergence, media events which draw us together as a local, national or global community” (Lumby 1999, p.249). In *The Virtual Republic*, McKenzie Wark extends this image to the national obsession with being either for, or against, an Australian republic, “the word republic means the public thing”. He approvingly notes that Australia’s political system is “substantially republican already”. The Parliaments and the Courts of Australia are “fine institutions, product of a peculiarly English genius for institutions of government” (Wark 1997, p.xi). Wark’s nationalism fits neatly with his affection for the High Court:

What this book is about is the other requirement for the self-governance of a free people: cultural autonomy, [without which] I’m not sure one can truthfully speak of there being such a thing as an Australian people. (Wark 1997, p.xii)

McKenzie Wark is against rationalism and conservatism and declares he’s for *talking about* virtual reformism, “bit by bit”. In a similar vein Wark’s fellow-traveller down the postmodern path, Graeme Turner, sees this new-wave of nationalist fervour (good and postmodern nationalism) cleverly and subversively represented by the Akubra hat, RM Williams boots and the Drizabone coat being elevated to “the status of high fashion” (1994, p.4). It is, for Graeme Turner, a shift away from a “version of the national character [which] is prescriptive, unitary, masculinist and excluding”. It is also a shift *towards* ‘new’ nationalist discourses that “endorse Australian identities which are not just tolerant of cultural differences but are actually constituted by them...not marked by their cultural purity but by their hybridity” (Turner 1994, p.8).

⁴⁹ The republic debate is taken up in chapter 6: *Where were you on November 11?* to illustrate my discussion of Australian political journalism.

Grey Collar Journalists: Soldiers and Revolutionaries

Over many years a number of fine correspondents have also served in the armed forces of their nations. Some, like Orwell fought on the side of revolution. Each of them made lasting contributions to the art of news reporting. For the past 100 years grey collar journalists have felt the tug of their news instincts competing with the ideological pressure to support their own side. Practically every day, news reporters must decide to either question what those in power say is the truth; or stay within the ideological news sphere of consensus (Hallin 1986, 1994). The first choice can mean glory or infamy - depending on the 'outcome' of the story. The latter means staying safe and reporting from within a framework that upholds, enhances and 'churns' what appears to be the logical political wisdom of the society in which they feel most at home, the land of their birth, or their adopted homeland.

Reporters, especially under conditions of military censorship or when covering foreign affairs for major media outlets, work under the constant threat of a story being 'spiked' if it does not meet expected standards of editorial policy. Rarely, if ever, are such dictates likely to be outside the bounds of the 'national interest'. It is rarer still, for a newsworker to voluntarily, or for any length of time, step outside these limits of controversy (Hallin 1986; 1994). From the days of the Cold War on, it is clear that the nature of modern (Postmodern?) war has changed. Henry Kissinger's "limited war" is now a reality and must be "managed as part of a politico-military continuum" (Young & Jesser 1997). In essence, the entire world is on a permanent war footing, just like in Orwell's *Oceania*, with the more powerful nations at constant readiness to engage in low-intensity conflict anywhere, any time. The populace of these countries must also be 'combat-ready', thus the propaganda must be constant - hearts and minds must be controlled. The message must be constantly refined and 'spun' to favour the interests of the powerful:

This process of continuous alteration was applied not only to newspapers... [but] to every kind of literature or documentation which might conceivably hold any political or ideological significance. Day by day and almost minute by minute the past was

brought up to date. In this way...the Party could be shown...to have been correct, nor was any item of news, or any expression of opinion, which conflicted with the needs of the moment, ever allowed to remain on record. (Orwell 1988, p35)

The media must be sweet-talked, cajoled and, when necessary, bullied into compliance. Only a few, such as Wilfred Burchett, American satirical journalist Mike Moore and John Pilger, can sustain themselves and their careers by standing permanently beyond the fringes of censorship and self-censorship. Many others vacillate, swinging between acceptance of the system and the horror of its excesses. Others will embrace the dominant ideology with open arms and will deviate from the 'line' only to offer a mild rebuke, or a little helpful criticism. Like that God-awful drone P.P. McGuinness, their vitriol is reserved, mostly, for their erstwhile colleagues in the media. Particularly those of the 'Left', with whom they disagree feverishly. As we shall see in the following chapters, the snapping of the political consensus over an important issue is a fault line in the system that attracts media attention - that's what the news is all about; be it local, national or global. This is the dialectic of the front-page, items competing for space and decisions made on both economic and ideological grounds.

According to Young and Jesser, modern warfare does not require massive national sacrifice to sustain - at least it is not noticeable⁵⁰ - this has "freed the citizen of the obligations governments could call upon in earlier wars of national survival," (1997, p.17). This is why we see George Bush, Tony Blair, John Howard and other leaders commanding the public sphere and haranguing their own people with a heavy-artillery rhetoric about patriotism and duty. The trouble for these leaders of the 'Free World' is that not everyone buys it every time: a

⁵⁰ The long-term impact on the world economy and environment from these almost constant so-called 'limited' wars are only just being assessed for the first time. Small, but degrading, 'battlefield' nuclear weapons material is scattered all over Iraq, Afghanistan and the former Soviet Republics (eg. Chechnya). The economies of entire countries and regions have been destroyed. Food production has stopped and whole populations are on the move to dreadful 'refugee' camps. Children are maimed and poisoned. The cities, towns and people are reduced to physical and emotional rubble. It is all just 'collateral damage'.

small, but significant number will always resist, even if without much apparent success in the short term. Grey collar journalists play an important role in stimulating debate and causing citizens to question their wisdom of the elites.

Conclusion

I have demonstrated in this chapter that at the beginning of the 21st Century Australian nationalism retains a strong grip on the popular consciousness, despite six decades of multi-ethnic immigration. Furthermore, I argue that it is holding firm in the face of the “unprecedented historical change” across the world stage in the last 20 years (Alomes & Jones 1991, p.453). I have demonstrated that nationalism is today a hegemonic component of the emotional dialectic - as it has been for at least two centuries.

The Cold War has been over for almost a decade, but today hegemonic ideologies of capitalism insist that the ‘nation’ must stand firm against external threats and dangers, in particular ‘international terrorism’⁵¹. Alomes and Jones argue that nationalism maintains and renews its power via the media and popular culture despite the homogenising experiences of ‘globalisation’ and “the different experiences people have of class and region, gender and ethnicity” (1991, p.453). They write that cultural nationalism in Australia at the end of the 20th Century is strong, while “political and economic nationalism are weak” (1991, p.454). However, I disagree: international events in the post-Cold War period (from the early 1990s on) would suggest that nationalism perhaps the most potent global ideology and that is at the very core of Australian political and economic being and consciousness. The same can be said of domestic politics and culture. This is not only clear in the way the Australian government

⁵¹ As I write this, 8 October 2001, the United States and Britain have just launched a series of missile and air strikes against ‘targets’ in Afghanistan in response to a suicidal terror attacks in New York and Washington DC (September 11) in which four planes were hijacked and crashed into buildings killing over 6000 people. The alleged mastermind, Osama Bin Laden is reputed to be headquartered in Afghanistan. Early reports indicate a high number of civilian casualties in Kabul and other cities.

and media have approached international issues, such as the collapse of Indonesia; it is reflected in domestic political debate too⁵².

Grey collar journalists: A left intelligentsia?

In a final chapter of *The Shadow of 1917* called 'Writers and Communism', Robert Manne concludes that, in the first half of the Century a layer of the Western intelligentsia was drawn to the socialist left. It is not hard to imagine Orwell's socialism as the product of a deeply held "belief that this movement represented the fulfilment of the Enlightenment project" (Manne 1994, p.242).

Along with George Orwell, we could include the British journalist, Arthur Ransome in Manne's category of deluded post-Enlightenment intellectual (I would call them grey collar) and it is obvious that the American pair of John Reed and Louisa Bryant were founding members⁵³. Robert Manne might also agree that such luminary post-war Australian journalist-writers as John Pilger, George Johnston, Charmian Clift, Anne Summers, Adele Horin, Mungo McCallum and many more who would willingly accept the description 'Fellow Traveller'. The American Ernest Hemmingway would also qualify for membership of this coterie. In 1917 Hemmingway began as a junior report with the Kansas City *Star*. That the same year that he volunteered as an ambulance driver with the Italian army where he was wounded and gathered material for his novel *A Farewell to Arms*, first published in 1929. Hemmingway was not a good soldier who felt the "ridiculousness of carrying a pistol", which gave him a "vague sort of shame when I met English-speaking people" (Hemmingway 1994, p.28). An aversion to guns did not stop Hemmingway from also siding with the Spanish Republicans in 1936.

Even today, I would argue, emotional dialectic of shared nationalist sentiment is so strong among most Western populations that it is rarely challenged in the mainstream press, radio and television. Reporters, whether from private school

⁵² The durability of Pauline Hanson and her One Nation cronies is ample evidence of this and when John Howard's slightly moderated Hansonism is taken into account it's beyond doubt.

⁵³ Reed and Bryant spent a long time in Russia in 1917-19 and were founding members of the American Communist Party. They were both respected journalists. A previous version of this chapter contained a long section on their work, but it has been omitted for space reasons.

backgrounds, like George Orwell, Alan Moorehead and Chester Wilmot, or products of the 'school of hard-knocks', like Wilfred Burchett, will always get caught up in the stories they cover. The 'line' they take depends on a number of complex factors. As I have demonstrated in this chapter, one determinant - a positive or negative attitude towards one's own government - is a matter of timing and circumstance. As I have shown, grey collar journalists can fall on either side of the patriotic line ('Are you with us, or against us?'). This represents one of the key fractures in the ideology of journalism. It is a contradiction that can push newswriters either to the left, or to the right in relation to particular news events. Only rarely, under extreme duress - such as a prolonged and unpopular military crisis - will the emotional attitude of a large number of journalists come close to class-consciousness, rather than the sectional consciousness of occupation. Under different circumstances, some editorial newswriters will accept the flattery, bribery or threats that are put in their way by governments; others will remain true to an internationalist consciousness.

Chapter 5

Class and the journalism of politics

The media do contest and raise questions about government policy, but they do so almost exclusively within the framework determined by the essentially shared interests of state-corporate power. Divisions among elites are reflected in media debate, but departure from their narrow consensus is rare. (Chomsky 1989, p.75)

This chapter extends the grey collar thesis by examining how the narrow consensus paradigm of liberal democracy constructs a citizenry and an audience that appears to be ‘classless’. The framework for reporting politics in Australia accepts the ideological and flawed premise of an egalitarian national culture. It also rarely, if ever challenges the basic assumption of fair and equitable market forces (see for example, Donald Horne’s *The Lucky Country*, first published in 1964). In Australian newspapers today, there are very few explicit references to class, the exception being throwaway lines about the so-called ‘chattering’ classes, or the new ‘intellectual’ class. The audience is assumed to be the nation and the hegemonic consensus for political news is the ‘national interest’ as discussed in the previous chapter.

No questions? Good, let’s move on.

The shared interests of state-corporate power in Australia are best served when the media does not question too deeply the fundamental beliefs at the core of liberal-democratic ideology. For example, that Australian society is truly egalitarian and that everyone gets a ‘fair go’:

There is a whole set of Australian characteristics summed up in the phrase ‘Fair go, mate’. This is what happened in Australia to the ideals of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity...The general Australian

belief is that it is the government's job to see that everyone gets a fair go-from old age pensioners to manufacturers. A fair go usually means money. (Horne 1978, p.14)

Horne's summary of liberal-democratic ideology is basically a shopping list of ingredients: "respect the rule of law"; "the principle of tolerance"; "equal rights" and "citizens participating in the public sphere" (1994, pp.7-8). This concoction is held together by a free market that operates to sell commodities and maximise the benefits to both customers and sellers utilising the laws of 'supply and demand'. When revisiting his 'lucky country' in 1987 Horne argued that the "native bourgeoisie" were no more than "the local agents of the [colonial] British [ruling class]" and therefore there is "no resident Australian 'ruling class'" (Horne 1987, p.131).

***Mixing the 'normative' with the 'sociological'
- A potent critique***

Political scientist, Rodney Tiffen (1989; 1994, pp.53-67) has provided a potent critique of Horne's position from an institutionalist perspective and frames the contradiction in terms of "mixing the normative with the sociological":

Thus we stand at a moment when this tradition of liberal ideals and theories about society still serves as the basis of our thinking, even though we know they are not adequate for making institutional choices. (Tiffen 1994, p.55)

In this chapter I take this 'institutional' critique further and pursue it from my Marxist and grey collar perspectives. I argue that the social category of class is absent but implicit in the emotional dialectic of Australian political journalism. SMH journalist, Paul Sheehan made this point in a discussion of why the media had not "fully absorbed" the impact of Pauline Hanson on Australian politics:

...they were so busy pouring buckets of bile and patronising contempt on the working class in Australia that they couldn't see their own position as a sort of new clergy, a new sort of clergy in the church of globalism. (Sheehan, cited in O'Regan 2001b, p.9)

Further, this traditional style of political reporting still relies on the rhetoric of liberal-democratic theory, even though it is acknowledged as flawed. Senior

SMH political reporter Michelle Grattan, is very conscious of the balancing act between the ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ of liberal democratic market societies that most journalists must live each day:

The other, contradictory face of today’s journalism feels the need to link the newspaper to its market [audience] by shared good works, which can include the practice of democracy...Civic journalism breaks down the wall between paper and people. (Grattan 1998, p.2)

This comment by Michelle Grattan is consistent with the grey collar journalism thesis – newswriters display a contradictory and fractured consciousness because of the social relations of news production under which they operate. However, the limits to any challenge that newswriters might mount to liberal-democratic ideology rarely extend beyond “the comings and goings of party politics”, and rarely (if ever) discusses “more general questions such as what shape the state should be” (James 1996a, p.2). There is, in Australian political journalism a “settled sense” that liberal-democratic ideals are perhaps the best we can hope for:

...however much we might complain about the liberal democratic state it continued to work well enough to muddle on. Spates of marginal change were largely accepted and routinized as the outcome of the different parties putting their stamp upon government. (James 1996a, p.3)

This chapter theorises and demonstrates how reporters adopt and reproduce the dominant ideology of liberal democratic capitalism in their reporting of politics. The focus of this chapter is on Australian political reporting, in particular recent elections. Here I employ both political economy and cultural studies approaches, as previously outlined, to examine the role of the mass media in the circulation of political ideas in a capitalist society. Tiffen adopted a similar approach in *News & Power* (1989, pp.127-151) and noted three factors crucial to analysing media coverage of elections:

1. The “sheer intensity” of the coverage and the “herd journalism” of the media pack;

2. The media's reliance of a "profusion of public performances" by party leaders and the consequent lack of alternative sources, or access to "private information";
3. The dominant framework of "campaign as contest", which leads to the neglect of "campaign as policy forum". (Tiffen 1989, p.130)

In extending this analysis, I argue that the media is also one of the important sites for the production and *reproduction* of a consensus ideology - a set of emotional attitudes that engenders loyalty to the Nation-State. It is an ideology that is in essence structured around the needs of Capital - for a subservient and compliant working class and a coherent political program for government. This ideological construct of the 'nation' is hegemonically effective in that it protects and enhances the dominant position of the ruling class in the economy, politics, culture and in social life. The concept of hegemony is characterised as "sovereignty" over people and territory (the nation) in a liberal-democratic schematic:

...meaning the effective right of one government to exercise exclusive control by varying combinations of law and force, consent and coercion over all the people and resources within a bounded territorial area, [it is] the central defining characteristic of the modern state. (Emy & James 1996, p.8)

The what's what of news: Different strokes for different folks

These days, few people, aside from committed left-wing traditionalists, put forward the idea of a concerted and permanent anti-ALP campaign by media barons. (Parker 1990, p.6)

Marxist critiques of the Australian media have not been intellectually fashionable in the post-Fordist, post-Cold War, postmodernist 1990s and they still make many cultural theorists uncomfortable⁵⁴. Recent work has derided the Marxist

⁵⁴ The Australian 'godfather' of postmodernism, Professor John Hartley of the Queensland University of Technology even went so far as to accuse me of wanting to kill him. This is taken up in chapter 8, *Killing me softly*.

position of the late 1970s and scorned any analysis based on class, ideology, and power. Critics find fault with what they see as complaints of an "anti-worker conspiracy" (Granato 1991, p.60), or what Derek Parker (1990, p.5) calls "the myth - for it is nothing more or less - of the dominant proprietor."

A conspiracy of the press barons?

In his book *The Courtesans*, about the Canberra press Corp during the Hawke government (1983-1990) Parker (1990) describes the conspiracy of proprietors a left wing "myth" that does not stand up in the modern world. Parker argues that this criticism is no longer valid. He says political intervention by proprietors in the newsroom was not as great in the 1980s as it was in earlier decades. He notes that in the 1983 federal election, Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser could not rely on support from the Murdoch newspapers (Parker 1990, p.6).

Derek Parker's central argument is that editorial power has shifted away from proprietors and towards newswriters:

...from the boardrooms, if it was ever there, to newsrooms; from owners (some of whom, like Murdoch, have turned their talents to the international arena) to journalists." (Parker 1990, p.6)

According to Parker's account, political journalists have an important obligation to report "fairly and faithfully" from Canberra. This is based on what Parker describes as the concept of "informed consent", and remains at the centre of "any analysis of the political role of the media, regardless of whether the focus of attention is media proprietors, or journalists" (1990, p.7). Journalist and commentator, Mark Day, has updated this theory somewhat in response to the November 2001 election. Day argues that proprietors no longer call the shots, audiences do:

Newspaper opinion was once the fiat of the proprietor. Today, readership profiles are likely to have a greater influence on the decision than what the boss thinks. (Day 2001, p.4)

Day's justification for this statement is the fact that there is now a "greater emphasis being placed on the marketing position of news" and that editors cannot afford to upset their readers (Day 2001, p.4). We could add that proprietors don't need to intervene on a daily basis. Murdoch holds an annual

get-together for his senior staff at which his opinions are shared with news executives. Further, the editor is usually handpicked by the proprietor and therefore has the 'managerial' function of Capital as well as the 'trust' of a senior lackey.

Ian Ward (1992) offers another explanation that does not rely on conspiracy theories and, in fact, supports my central thesis - that the relations of production will finally determine news content. Part of the reason the Press Gallery seems to act on a 'herd' instinct, Ward suggests, is because of the physical distance between the journalists and their capital city editors (1992, p.172). Certainly this is an issue and something that the Gallery itself has commented on as leading to 'isolation' (Kelly 1991; Buckley 1991; Grattan 1991). In another sense we can see this as a lessening of the social control mechanisms available to editors and proprietors in a situation "removed from the immediate supervision of distant editors and news directors, and well insulated from proprietorial influence (Ward 1992, p.172). This is not surprising in terms of the grey collar thesis that the reasons for 'bias' or other manifestations of the emotional dialectic can be found "in the normal everyday processes of newswork" (Ward 1992, p.177)⁵⁵.

Rodney Tiffen documents several election campaigns from the 1960s through to the early 1980s in which media proprietors have attempted to influence the outcome, often with the help of their senior journalists (Tiffen 1989, pp.147-148). MacCallum (2001) notes how Alan Reid was often given assignments by Frank Packer to assist conservative politicians during the 1960s. Tiffen (1989) outlines four recent cases in which intervention is worth noting, 1961; 1972; 1975 and 1980.

In 1961 *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Daily Telegraph* were "more participants than observers" with the Fairfax papers endorsing the Labor party and throwing the resources of its newspapers behind Arthur Calwell. On the other side Sir Frank Packer's *Telegraph* was supporting Robert Menzies (Tiffen 1989, p.147).

⁵⁵ In relation to the Canberra Press Gallery, this issue is further discussed in the following chapter: *Where were you on November 11?*

Sir Frank Packer sold *The Daily Telegraph* to Rupert Murdoch in 1972, just in time for the new owner to shift his allegiance away from the coalition to the emerging Labor Party of Gough Whitlam. Mungo MacCallum relates the story of how Packer and Murdoch sealed the deal and rang William McMahon who was upset at the news:

Packer handed the phone to Murdoch, who promised formally to treat the McMahon government with the utmost fairness. Packer interjected: 'If you do that you'll crucify the bastard'. (MacCallum 2001, p.221)

Tiffen notes that after the sale, Rupert Murdoch's suggestions for news coverage were "irresistible" to his staff:

In 1975 when Whitlam's star was waning, the issues were clear cut, and the electorate divided, Murdoch's papers did an about face and got stuck into the Labor Party at every opportunity. (Tiffen 1989, p.149)

While the Murdoch press's reporting of the 1980 contest between Bill Hayden and Malcolm Fraser attracted less critical attention, it perhaps had more electoral impact. The Labor Party was challenging News Limited's acquisition of Channel Ten in Sydney and thus "a major media company had a direct and tangible stake in the outcome" of the election. Tiffen notes that the Murdoch papers:

...became increasingly propagandistic" focussing on Stock Exchange panic at the prospect of a Labor victory and running a successful (if factually wrong) campaign against the introduction of a wealth tax following a Labor victory. (Tiffen 1989, p.150)

Changing the conspiracy rules

In 1993, the Keating government was still changing the rules of newspaper and television ownership, apparently to favour certain players, such as Conrad Black and Kerry Packer (Benchley & Davies 1993, p.1). One media maverick claimed to have been frozen out of the potentially lucrative television narrowcasting market by the big players, in collusion with the government (Loane 1993, p.11). In 1993, there were no serious suggestions that interventions by media owners in any way affected the outcome of the election. In fact, two newspaper editors

went so far as to tell a Senate inquiry into foreign ownership of the Australian media that there was explicitly no interference (Riley 1994). However, a critical assessment of the role of the media in an election campaign does not rely on 'conspiracy theories' about manipulation of the press. After the 1993 election, the late *SMH* columnist, Peter Smark, joked about the notion that there's a media conspiracy against Labor:

In our attempts at fairness, they find a media plot, a newspaper's schemed campaign against Labor and deep-set personal prejudice...I wish I was as sure of Australia's future best interests as to arrange a campaign either for or against either side.

This humorous aside does not seriously address the issue of media bias, either at the organisational level, or through direct interventions by media owners. In the past direct intervention has been overt, but it is now argued that those days are over (Parker, 1990). While this may be true, it is still the case that the presentation of news is constructed in such a way that it reflects directly the interests of Capital.

Derek Parker's criticism of what he describes as the left's position on media ownership patterns in Australia is only valid in so far as what he's attacking is itself a caricature of a poorly conceived theory. His dismissive tone should not by itself lead to an abandonment of the Marxist 'political economy' approach to the question of media ownership as articulated by the (now very 'lapsed') Marxist historian Keith Windschuttle (1988). Windschuttle cites three important considerations that militate against proprietorial interference:

1. Party allegiance determines how audiences "interpret media reporting"
2. The vast number of swinging voters can be influenced by the media thereby making the news media "politically powerful";
3. The independence of newswriters and their adherence to news values that are "matters of judgment rather than hard and fast objective assessment", which leads to the party that generates the best news being "reported more prominently" (Windschuttle 1998, pp.311-318).

*Disguising class interest:
The limited value of democratic theory models*

There are several hegemonic emotional dialectics working across the scenario as outlined by Windschuttle. Each of them is aligned with the dominant ideology of liberal-democracy and seems commonplace. It is therefore, not necessary for the left to rely on outdated 'conspiracy theories' to explain the role of the media in reproducing the dominant and narrow consensus ideology. My grey collar thesis provides two very reasonable explanations:

- ?? the analysis of newswork as commodity production and the contingent relations of production uncovers the common class interests of media owners and other operators of Capital⁵⁶;
- ?? the contradictory class-consciousness of newswriters and their ultimate adherence to a reformist liberal world view.

While *The Courtesans* (Parker 1990) is scornful of attempts to prove a conspiracy by media owners, there is a strong case to be argued for an 'unconscious conspiracy' of common class interests.

For Derek Parker and many others in the 'mainstream' of media criticism, the critique of Marxist theory rests on a position of support for "modern democracy", in which, "the relationship between the community and its leaders is usually indirect" (1990, p.1). Variants of the modern democracy theory share some elements. They reject the notion of a class struggle, and assume that the capitalist 'market economy', combined with a Parliamentary political system, is the best (if imperfect) form of organisation available to society.

In such "Democratic theory" models (Tiffen 1994, p.67) the media's role is to inform the public 'objectively, so that 'the community' can make 'rational' decisions. Rodney Tiffen characterises this as an imperfect system but nevertheless believes that the institutions of the Australian media fall "well within the bounds of democratic performance" in relation to the way they frame "news selection and interpretation" (Tiffen 1994, pp.64-67). I have demonstrated that this position is itself a product of Capital's hegemony in the field of ideology

⁵⁶ This argument is detailed in Chapter 3: *Hard Yakka*.

and theory. The following section demonstrates how this hegemony is constructed in practice and how it relates to the demographic profile of individual news outlets.

Classification of the news audience

“Our readers have to make a decision, and we should too. These days philosophies [of the major parties] are more blurred, so you have to be pragmatic deciding who’ll make the better government rather than simply falling on one side of the left/right divide.”

(Campbell Reid, editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, cited in Day 2001, p.4)

While the emotional dialectic of consensus politics and ideology of liberal democratic theory attempt to deny the existence of class in Australia, there are differences in political attitudes between newspapers - broadly these can be judged by whether they are broadsheet or tabloid, and what the perceived target audience is. For example, as Keith Windschuttle (1988) points out in relation to reporting of strikes and industrial issues:

Businessmen are not given homilies about the evils of unionism but rather advice on how to manage industrial relations. (Windschuttle 1988, p.342)

Similar distinctions can be applied to television, particularly between the ABC and SBS on one side and the commercial networks on the other (Hirst, White, Wilson & Chaplin 1995). Discussing how Sydney’s papers might editorialise about the November 2001 federal election, *The Australian*’s media columnist, Mark Day, provided a snapshot of their demographic that alludes to class differences:

...you could expect The Sydney Morning Herald with its high North Shore wealth belt to endorse the Coalition while the Telegraph’s dominance in the west would put it in the Labor fold... The Australian [readership] is more likely to be professionals in individualistic occupations [who might] take a loftier view of what passes for political vision in this country. (Day 2001, p.4)

However, Day does not endorse this line, going on to point out that in November 2001 the swinging voters in western Sydney are “Howard’s battlers” who might vote for the coalition. It is not as simple as proprietors interfering, Day argues, because the editors have some latitude in such day-to-day decision-making (Day 2001, p.4).

*The emotional dialectic
- swings and roundabouts*

As noted in previous chapters, most newswriters do not have a fully formed consciousness of themselves as proletarians. The emotional dialectics of newswriting confirm some beliefs and challenge others - depending on the issue and the circumstance. Along with the grey collar class *location*, a grey collar *consciousness* can be contradictory and range from ‘hard left’ to ‘hard right’ with many variations in between. Grey collar journalists are, mostly, of the view that their ‘professional’ stature makes them ‘middle class’. On the other hand, as we have seen above, Australian media owners have no such illusions.

As Mark Day’s surface analysis makes clear, each section of the press has a different role within this overall ideological consensus-building function. As argued below these can be broadly defined as - confuse and divide the working class; entertain, inform and reassure the ‘middle class’; and conduct rational debate for Capital.

The terrible tabloids

Reporting for the tabloids is its own solution to this problem [of Canberra’s isolation]. The Telegraph Mirror gives a reasonable degree of prominence to Canberra stories, but the stories have to mean something to real people to get a run. (Buckley 1991, p.102)

The tabloid press in most Australian capital cities has a high circulation in localities with high working class concentration. The correlation is deliberate on the part of the papers; they deliberately aim the prose at readers with an ‘average’ intelligence. They also tend to be fiercely anti-working class during industrial disputes (Windschuttle 1988). In my view, in subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) ways they teach the working class to hate themselves. In an election period, the tabloid press and prime time commercial current affairs programs focus broadly on the personalities of the leaders, the ‘horse race’ aspects of the

campaign, and the impact of competing policies on the 'ordinary' person in the street. This constructs an atomised and classless audience, in which:

Individuals are constantly asked to respond in individualistic terms, never in terms of any communal, let alone economically-defined [class] interests. (Bell, Boehringer & Crofts 1982, p.53)

One way of obscuring class relations is to describe everyone as 'Australian', and to issue editorial paeans to patriotism and the national interest. The media is not alone in promoting the emotional dialectic of a classless, uniform Australia. The nationalist tradition is as old as the white Australia policy. It is used very successfully in advertising, and finds its modern political expression in the rhetoric of the Hawke and Keating governments (Hirst, 1983, p.32; Hirst 1995).

The strength of this nationalist dialectic is that it naturalises an ideology that implies it is necessary for 'Australians' to cut their living standards, without acknowledging that the burden of the cuts is not shared equally. This is made explicit in an editorial from the Murdoch tabloid, *The Daily Telegraph-Mirror* (Allan, 1993, p.13). Being a little more strident and aggressive than *The Sun-Herald*, the *Telegraph Mirror* goes onto the attack against the excesses of trade union power:

Historically this country's workforce has far too often resorted to the blunt instruments of industrial relations confrontation - the strike, the lockout, the go-slow, the work to rule, the demarcation dispute and the myriad of other techniques of disruption. (Allan 1993, p.13)

Given that the bulk of *Telegraph Mirror* readers are workers, many of them in trade unions, such editorialising is sending a powerful message of hate and self-hate to the paper's mass audience. However, one might expect class-conscious ALP voters to recognise what the leader writer does not: lockouts are imposed on workers when management literally 'locks them out' of their workplace.

During the 1993 election campaign the *Telegraph Mirror* editorial line strongly favoured a rapid shift to enterprise bargaining and said that Labor's move in this direction was too slow. It ended with the imperative that voters decide which party offers a "more efficient economy and a more realistic and sustainable level of income for Australian workers." (Allan 1993, p.13) The message is simple;

unions get in the way of the economy becoming more efficient, and without that increase in efficiency, the wages of workers cannot be expected to rise.

Middle-brow broadsheets

The broadsheet print media, the ABC and SBS are much more forums for informed speculation, and the expression of diverse viewpoints, but they also limit the discussion of politics to the definitions allowed by the "professional values" of the journalists and editors (Bell, Boehringer & Crofts 1982, p.106). Another way of describing the parameters of debate in the 'quality' press is to use the spheres of "consensus" and "controversy" outlined by Daniel Hallin (1994). In this model, the sphere of informed debate and controversy is "defined primarily by the two-party system", and "within this region, objectivity and balance reign as the supreme journalistic values" (Hallin 1994, p.116)

The audience for broadsheet journalism is the educated *grey collar* working class, professionals and middle management. To some extent these layers, like manual workers, are buffeted around by the periodic crises in the system, seeing their status dropping as their work is automated, dispensed with, or devalued in the process that American socialist Harry Braverman called "proletarianisation" in his landmark book, *Labor and Monopoly Capitalism* (1974)⁵⁷. As a result of the process of proletarianisation (we might also call it the 'pauperisation of the middle classes') there are fewer avenues for 'upward mobility' and it can be argued that the working class, far from disappearing, is being reconstituted as a 'grey collar' class, combining both traditional 'blue collar' workers and 'white collar' employees in the service sector. One writer has made the novel, but plausible, suggestion that this 're-emerging' working class constituted an important constituency for the Labor Party and was a factor in them winning the 1993 election (Manning, 1993). Certainly Labor would have appreciated the sometimes-reckless comments of then shadow treasurer Peter Reith, whom journalist Narelle Hooper described as Hewson's "bovver boy":

In his zeal to sell Fightback!, Reith frequently oversteps the bounds of credibility: for example his blithe promise to workers during a tour

⁵⁷ For an exposition of Braverman's arguments refer to Chapter 3: *Hard Yakka*.

of Sandhurst Foods that a coalition victory would be like Christmas.

(Hooper 1993, p.25)

***Business media:
Keeping the bastards honest***

With few exceptions business papers and magazines are by far the most honest press in a capitalist society. A handful of television programs have tried to establish an audience of managers and investors, notably *Business Sunday* on Channel Nine, but its success can be more accurately measured by the stories generated for Monday's *Australian Financial Review*, rather than ratings. The business press codifies and circulates vital information between the managers and owners of Capital, and as Windschuttle (1988) shows it tends to offer realistic advice, rather than the misinformation aimed at a wider, working class audience.

In their role as the producers of an "economic ideology" for Capitalism (Harman, 1993, p.12) establishment economists, and their disciples in the media, are always in a position to offer useful insights into the problems of the system. Sometimes the honesty of their assessments must cause knowledgeable readers to wonder if capitalism has any future at all.

One area of news coverage where the tabloids, broadsheets and business press tend to be in agreement is in the reporting of industrial action by workers, which Windschuttle describes as the most political role of the media in a capitalist society:

...its real concern is to put down the challenge to authority that is inherent in strike action...the media is falsely encouraging moral panics about strikes and portraying union leaders as folk devils in order to maintain social control over the workforce. (Windschuttle 1988, pp.345-346)

Windschuttle notes that, in his view, journalists are "for all intents and purposes the same as any other group of unionists", but the way the news media commonly reports strike action "speaks against [newswriters] as unionists and workers" (1988, p.351). While this view is the orthodoxy and certainly true in most cases, one recent example bucks this trend and indicates that grey collar

newswriters do adopt a pro-worker position in relation to important industrial disputes.

Picket lines and headlines

In 1998 a serious industrial dispute erupted on Australia's heavily-unionised waterfront over a decision by one company, Patrick's Stevedoring, to outsource its labour needs to an offshore company that had been established with non-union labour. It became clear early in the dispute that the media would be caught up in a "propaganda war" between the employers and government on one side and the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) on the other (Baker & Oakham 1999, p.127-149). The media coverage was remarkable for the fact that the major outlets did not immediately fall into line with the company and the government (as you might expect if a conspiracy theory was to hold true). Over the period of the dispute the coverage was mostly even-handed and occasionally favourable to the unions involved. The sight of Channel Nine's 'hard man' Mike Munro on the picket line speaking almost deferentially to MUA leader John Coombes was priceless. Baker and Oakham summarise the propaganda victory for the union as the result of its "sophisticated media strategy":

...the media never depicted the wharfies as 'the enemy within' but rather as a workforce, whose productivity levels were questioned, but whose dismissal in the middle of the night raised grave industrial and political issues. (Baker & Oakham 1999, p.142)

Baker and Oakham conclude that the union won the propaganda war because its leaders were able to "tune in to news values and newsroom routines" (1999, p.146). In short, they did a better public relations job. But as they themselves note, this is really only half the story; the other half is the "ideological context" in which journalism "always operates" (Baker & Oakham 1999, p.146). Their upbeat conclusion is further confirmation of the validity of the grey collar thesis of contested ground in newswriters' "internalised professional ideologies":

...and the willingness of the journalists involved in covering this dispute to enter that struggle must be surely one of the most encouraging signs of all for the future of the profession." (Baker & Oakham 1999, p.147)

I think an important element of the sympathetic coverage that the maritime union received during this dispute was the fact that the media was forced to confront the popular pressure of large sections of the Australian working class backing the unionists. For a few moments the tide of class forces shifted in favour of the workers and the reporters covering the dispute could sense this. They were also caught up in this emotional dialectic for a time and it forced its way onto the front-page and even into the editorials. This is a rare occurrence as my media archaeology confirms. I have been able to find only a few examples where this has happened. Most recently I found an op-ed piece in the Courier-Mail by news editor Tony Koch, though the fact that Murdoch's archival Kerry Packer is associated with the story may have something to do with why the column appeared:

My sympathy for abattoir workers came about more than 20 years ago when I reported on a series of industrial commission inspections of meatworks in southern Queensland... So, it is with quite some sympathy, I looked on the plight of 1350 meatworker families who face ruin because the Kerry Packer-owned Consolidated Meat Holdings decided that, having spent \$20 million updating their Lakes Creek abattoir, it was now unprofitable to continue. (Koch 2002, p.25)

You see, this is a 'special case' and the real point of Koch's article is the Queensland branch of the National Party:

...the Nationals have again let down their fellow citizens - the working class - in Rockhampton. But who's surprised. (Koch 2002, p.25)

Dusting off some classy artefacts

I have just dusted off my fading collection of newspaper clippings that discuss class, about 30 or so from the last nine years. Most of them take a sociological perspective, a couple mention the waterfront dispute, and some are about wage disparities. None really offers much in the way of class analysis. Surprisingly a piece by Gerard Henderson in the Sydney Morning Herald comes closest when he mentions a book about the rise of a "super class" comprised of "chief

executives, barristers and corporate solicitors” (Henderson 1998, p.13). You can easily see from the headline, “The taint of class is back”, that Henderson was a believer in the classless Australia myth. The ‘working class’ in this piece is relegated to the “weak and the friendless” who cannot help themselves and this is typical of a number of pieces in my collection that refer to the ‘underclass’. The other end of the scale is the “gold collar worker” whose skills in the information economy are in demand:

The term gold collar first appeared in American Fortune [magazine] in a recent article about young employees commanding large pay packets and privileges because their skills are much in demand.
(Hornery 1998, p1)

This piece, “Heavenly Creatures” was on the front-page of the *Herald*’s weekend employment section. A few weeks later Nikki Barrowclough offered a different perspective that combined the super class and the underclass in one piece:

The subject of income inequality is no longer the dry domain of academics and economists. These days we’re all becoming increasingly aware that something doesn’t fit. The low-paid, often working in soul-destroying jobs and struggling to get by week to week, are told to exercise wage-restraint. At the other end of the scale, senior executives are negotiating ever more juicy deals for themselves. (Barrowclough 1998, p.16)

I was able to find only a handful of pieces in my collection that relate class to the electoral process. Mike Steketee’s column in the *Australian*’s coverage of “THE MILLENIUM POLL” (the 1998 election) talks about how both parties have done poorly on youth and long-term unemployment, but like so many similar pieces, this one tries to solve the problem within the framework of capitalism:

Hopefully the [government’s] fetish for downsizing is coming to an end, but the overall answer is to learn how to harness efficiency to jobs growth. (Steketee 1998, p.25)

‘Downsizing’ means sacking workers and harnessing efficiency to jobs growth means increasing the rate of exploitation by increasing productivity, while at the same time trying to get more people into low-paying jobs. “If it were saleable

politically the [Howard] Government probably also would be advocating lower wage rates for the less-skilled (Steketee 1998, p.25).

These brief examples indicate a range of emotional attitudes to the question of reporting class in the media. Like most things the media picks up on there are peaks and troughs, fads and favourites. We've heard no more of the gold collar info-tech workers since the dot.com crash of 2001. No doubt the cycle will come around again. Mostly, class is an implicit background noise, rather than an explicit element of political reporting. The main game during elections is to secure as much positive coverage, while minimising the damaging 'gaffes' and mistakes that can ruin a campaign (Tiffen 1989). The following section examines how the battle for the 'hearts and minds' of Australia's grey collar journalists takes place in the context of political reporting, in particular the 1993 federal election.

The 1993 Election: Structural Reform in a 'Classless' Australia

The notion of Australia as a classless society has abiding appeal.

Even John Hewson, in his Deakin lecture last October, talked eloquently in its defence, and lambasted the Federal Labor Government for one of the "unremarked tragedies of the past decade...the destruction of Australia as a classless society."

Yet whichever party wins the election, Australia is likely to become a less egalitarian country. (Horin 1993, p.15)

SMH journalist Adele Horin is certainly one of my grey collar heroes. In the nine years I have been collecting and sorting media artefacts looking for evidence of 'class' in Australian journalism, Horin is the only consistent depositor. This piece, one of the first I came across is headlined "Tough times ahead mock classless pretensions" and it ends with a swipe at both major parties just before the March 1993 federal election:

When you include the wage disparities that enterprise bargaining is designed to engender, especially under the Coalition but under Labor to some degree, then talk of a classless society rings of sentimental hogwash. (Horin 1993, p.15)

She's right, but this does not explain why John Hewson lost what many, including seasoned media analysts described as the unlosable election. One answer is that Hewson was a victim of his own rhetoric "of attack and defence", while Paul Keating was able to capitalise on the "visionary uplifting" rhetoric that appealed to people "hoping for a brighter future as they faced hard times" (McCarthy 1993, p.27). Rhetoric is undoubtedly a powerful tool that politicians employ in a range of circumstances, including elections, but is this enough of an answer? The Australian political media was predicting a Hewson victory and got it wrong. Perhaps they too were the victims of rhetoric - their own! Perhaps part of the problem was identified by senior journalist Paul Kelly in 1991, the Press Gallery had become too right-wing, though ironically perhaps because of the influence of Paul Keating:

The Gallery is essentially what I would describe as economic rationalist. It has been heavily influenced in its thinking during the 1980s by Paul Keating. (Kelly 1991, p.22)

Kelly wrote that in 1991 the Press Gallery was "mainstream" and very few "heretics", "no marxists", only a handful of "serious leftists" and "neo-conservatives" (Kelly 1991, p.21). His former Murdoch stablemate, Amanda Buckley was inclined to agree and dismisses Derek Parker's criticism that gallery journalists are "left-leaning":

...I believe that the Gallery outlook would be further to the right than most of the community...I have seen a steady movement of journalists from the social democratic camp into the liberal free market camp. (Buckley 1991, p.102)

So, if we can't blame the left-leaning Press Gallery for getting Keating over the line in March 1993, what happened? My analysis is that Labor won because it was able to appeal to the class instincts of Australian voters by generating a scare campaign against the introduction of a new tax, the GST, that most workers intuitively knew would erode their living standards. Gerard Henderson's analysis tends to support this view:

...to the men and women of the Press Gallery there was little understanding of the real and potential unpopularity of the Fightback

package. (Henderson 1993b, p.3)

The grey collar thesis helps to explain this apparent blind spot in the vision of journalists who themselves eschew the rhetoric of class in favour of a consensus ideology. Bell and Boehringer's post-election analysis argued that the "patently simplistic economism" of the media had been contradicted by the voters and that the journalists' collective response was "to attribute the result to the Liberals' poor salesmanship of their package" (Bell & Boehringer 1993, p.9).

The media agenda: 'Structural Reform'

The question of 'structural reform' of the national economy was a key media issue in the 1993 Australian federal election. However, this was not seen as an issue of 'class', but of 'national interest': reform of the economy is good for the nation, therefore, by definition good for everyone. By focusing on selected editorials, commentary by economics writers, and the debate about 'structural reform', this chapter argues that the real agenda during the election was how Australian-based Capital should deal with the recession and how the working class would react to John Hewson's 'radical' tax agenda.

To assess the extent of the dilemma facing Australian Capital at the time of the 1993 Federal Election it is necessary to review the state of the Australian economy and the continuing international recession that set the scene for the poll. For example, no one could ignore the 15 per cent drop in the value of the \$A against the US dollar in 1992 (Kavanagh, 1993, p.44), or one million unemployed.

Writing for a business audience John Kavanagh argues that large companies and government bureaucracies will continue to cut their workforce. To offset this decline, Kavanagh says small businesses will have to take up the slack.

While Labor and the coalition both "recognise that small business is vital", only the Liberals "have set up a policy that will make investment in small business far more attractive"(Kavanagh 1993, p.40). Kavanagh's detailed analysis of the coalition's small business policy was very positive. He praised the changes that would allow the owner of a small business to retire and take superannuation in the form of a capital gain on their initial investment:

The coalition proposes to let anyone over 60 sell a business and

claim a tax exemption on the value of the goodwill component of the sale up to 10 times average weekly earnings. (Kavanagh 1993, p.41)

The incentives offered by the ALP are quickly explained and Kavanagh concludes that small business "wins from both parties and emerges as the main beneficiary of the campaign" (Kavanagh 1993, p.41). An appropriate conclusion for the audience of *BRW*.

National unemployment figures topped one million in unadjusted terms during the campaign and the official (seasonally adjusted) rate was 10.9 per cent. Many commentators said that this fact coupled with Labor's tenth anniversary and its image as a 'tired' government this should have guaranteed an easy victory for the coalition (Henderson 1993b).

However, the Australian electorate did not necessarily believe that a change of government, or even keeping the same one, would improve the situation for them. A poll conducted by AGB McNair for *The Bulletin* indicated a strong sentiment that neither party could significantly improve Australia's economic performance (O'Reilly 1993a, p.13). A Newspann, published in *The Australian* (6 March 1993, p8), reported that both Opposition leader John Hewson and Prime Minister Paul Keating endured (rather than enjoyed) a high *unpopularity* rating. This measurable lack of confidence in both leaders was the result of the turmoil in state and federal politics over the preceding one to two years, as well as a response to 'tough' economic realities.

The Kennett factor

In the months preceding the federal poll there were several significant changes to the Australian political landscape, including the election of conservative governments in Tasmania, Western Australia and Victoria following several years of Labor rule in those states. The most significant was the election of Jeff Kennett in Victoria during 1992. After almost a decade of perceived Labor mismanagement of the Victorian economy, the Liberal-National coalition victory gave the conservatives a confidence boost in the build up to the federal

campaign⁵⁸. It also gave the new Victorian government a chance experiment with the tough union-busting tactics the coalition was planning federally. The backlash against Kennett's industrial relations 'reforms' continued during the federal election, and was considered by many to be a contributing factor in the eventual defeat of John Hewson on March 13 (Henderson 1993b).

Industrial Relations

Changes to Australia's industrial relations system were at the centre of much of the debate during the election, and it can be argued reflected the emergence of class as an issue in Australian politics though it was never explicitly stated in these terms (*The Socialist*, 1993a, p.3). The Labor Party's campaign on this issue centred on protection of award conditions in a 'safety net' proposal, in contrast to the Opposition's rapid deregulatory approach.

Paul Keating and the ALP appealed to the Australian ethos of 'a fair go' and characterised the conservative policy as grossly unfair, especially to low-paid and poorly organised workers. While the Opposition wanted to remove unions almost entirely from the bargaining process, Labor indicated a desire to put its ten-year Accord with the ACTU at the centre of its economics and labour platform (James 1996a). The Accord, while guaranteeing some small concessions for the trade union movement did not fundamentally alter Labor's commitment to the free market. Every modern Labor government has been committed to the capitalist market. This was apparent from the first government formed by the ALP 'baby-boomers' following Gough Whitlam's election in 1972 and continued under Bob Hawke and Paul Keating from 1983 to 1996 (Watts 1996, p.61). Both Amanda Buckley (1991) and Paul Kelly (1991) credit Paul Keating with 'educating' the Press Gallery in the 'theories' of economic rationalism. Buckley recalls that Keating's "relentless attempts to win journalists

⁵⁸ The Coalition government of John Howard went to the polls late in 2001 with the situation reversed. In the first half of 2001 the conservative parties were crushed in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Just four months away from a federal poll only South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory still had governments that were of the same complexion as John Howard's federal leadership.

over in argument” (1991, p.102). I’m sure journalists respond to this ‘flattery’ and feeling like they’re part of the ‘game’, apart from anything else.

‘Tweedle Dumb’ & ‘Tweedle Dumber’

In analysing the media's discussion of the policies put forward by Labor and the coalition during the 1993 federal election campaign, it becomes clear that there was in fact very little difference in substance between them - apart from the obvious issue of the GST (Bell & Boehringer 1993, p.8). In all of the rhetoric there was agreement that 'reform' of the relationship between employers and employees was the key issue. Both parties acknowledged the 'need' to embrace enterprise bargaining, an insidious form of wage control that disaggregated the trade union movement into its constituent workplace (enterprise) components. Enterprise bargaining was popular with both business and union leaders. Bosses wanted the protection of Award cover removed for the mass of workers while the union leadership wanted to preserve the Labor government through class-collaborationist policies designed to shore up profitability of Australian businesses (Bramble 1993).

There was also common ground between the major parties about the need for 'reform' of the welfare state and a shift towards 'user-pays' public services. The need to 'deregulate' was assumed and the only differences were over achievable prices, and the pace of 'privatisation'. Rob White (1996) traces the development of a new emotional dialectic of 'government' in what he calls the shift from the welfare to the “repressive” state during this period. He says it is characterised by market forces replacing the state as the natural provider of welfare services⁵⁹. White’s analysis parallels the position I have argued in previous chapters about the role of the modern capitalist state:

...there is an abiding pressure on the state in capitalist society to facilitate the process of capital accumulation, the principal element of which is to control labour...the role of the state in Australia is

⁵⁹ There’s no space to analyse this fully here, but the trends outlined by White in 1996 are confirmed by the policies of the Howard-led coalition government. In particular, the role of Tony Abbott as the minister overseeing welfare reform has been to push market forces and argue vociferously for a smaller government apparatus.

becoming even less that of an apparent welfare provider than that of an enforcer of a particular kind of social order. (White 1996, p.109)

In the context of the 1993 federal election, discussion of these issues represented the response of Australian-based Capital to the world recession (McCrann 1993a, p.31). The issue at the core of the debate in the ruling class was about methods of increasing profits (capital accumulation and the rate of surplus value), at the expense of labour. Rob Watts has characterised this ruling class dilemma as the “nightmarish novelty” of economic growth combined with shrinking employment opportunities, particularly “the near-destruction of the youth labour market” and “de-industrialization” of major urban centres during the late 1980s and early 1990s (Watts 1996, p.67). Solving some of these issues (after a fashion) was crucial to the ruling class in this period. According to Michael Gordon, Labor’s keynote policy plank included a cut in company taxes precisely because it would help small to medium enterprises to accumulate more capital, thus stimulating employment:

Keating’s strategy was simple: to turn the debate from responsibility for the jobless level to the question of which party was better placed to do something about it. (Gordon 1996, p.237)

However, the release of the January employment figures on 11 February generated banner headlines about unemployment reaching the million mark (Gordon 1996, p.238).

Editorially speaking...

There are two possible scenarios to explain the result. Either swinging voters do not read editorials telling them how to vote. Or they do read them, but remain unmoved. (Henderson 1993b, p.11)

During the 1993 election campaign this vital strategic discussion - how to deal with the economy - was carried in editorials, the finance pages, and business press. There were four important strands in the economics debate - reducing business taxes, cutting the public sector, removing government controls over the actions financial and industrial Capital, and 'reform' of the centralised wage-fixing system - each related to a central theme; increasing the profitability of Capital investment.

It is perhaps not surprising that these themes were the focus for most editorials during the 1993 election campaign. As Mark Day notes, editors and readers would expect the proprietor (or major shareholders) to “call the election shots” and because “proprietors were overwhelmingly conservative”, it is not unreasonable to expect editorials to reflect a conservative bias (Day 2001, p.4). This was certainly the case in the 1993 election.

The last issue of the Sydney *Sun-Herald* during the campaign period, headed its editorial "A critical choice", and continued:

The Sun-Herald believes this election is about the next government introducing a program which secures Australia's long-term future...The choice is yours. (1993, p.24)

The *Sun-Herald's* editorial writer describes the Labor Party as still "too wedded to a craft-union base" and Liberal leader John Hewson is said to have a "too theocratic approach to economic issues". The leaders of both parties were said to be committed to economic reform and recovery, but:

Dr Hewson intends to take us there faster, with less regard for casualties. Like an Irish stew, his administration could boil over. Paul Keating's approach is more managed. But he may be more selective about the tough decisions. (Sun-Herald 1993, p.24)

Throughout the world there is almost always a consensus amongst 'orthodox' economists (and editorialists) that wages and living standards must fall in order to push the cost of recovery on to workers (Harman, 1993, p.47). In modern capitalist ideology this strand of the emotional dialectic has become codified as the arena of industrial relations. Editorial writers and columnists during the 1993 election campaign took up this debate. Overwhelmingly they agreed that 'reform' of the wage-fixing system was at the heart of Capital's program for economic 'reform' and recovery.

In *The Sunday Telegraph* (March 7, 1993) editorialist Roy Miller is full of praise for the achievements of Labor under Bob Hawke and Paul Keating. But he writes that Labor "failed to deliver on two major fronts - the million plus unemployed and workplace reform" (Miller 1993, p.54). However, there's contradiction and distortion here. How can the editorial praise the Labor government for

"unprecedented co-operation" between workers and bosses, and at the same time argue that the ALP and the ACTU have not delivered on workplace reform? In part this is explained by the need of the *Telegraph* to speak to its overwhelmingly working class audience (predominantly in western Sydney and larger regional centres). The tabloid press must tread a fine line: on one hand, preaching consistent pro-bosses rhetoric, but at the same time not alienating proletarian and grey collar readers. Reflecting this ethos in the dialectic of its front-page, the Melbourne tabloid afternoon daily, *The-Herald Sun* (March 12, 1993) said John Hewson's coalition should be supported because it was more prepared to take the bolder steps necessary to rescue the Australian economy.

On the other hand, the broadsheet press, with a more upmarket readership can afford to be less circumspect in its editorialising. The Melbourne *Age* (March 12, 1993) said Australia needed a government committed to continuing the transformation of the economy begun by Labor, and added that the coalition would best serve that goal. In a similar vein, *The Australian's* editorial asked: "Who can best promote and secure changes that will allow Australia to prosper over the next decade?" It gave its own answer, the coalition. *The Australian* argued that:

There are deep reservations about both sides, but the weight of argument lies with a change of government. The best way to maximise progress for economic reform is to give a Coalition government the chance to implement its ambitious agenda. (Editorial, March 12)

Following the election, an editorial in *The Australian* (March 15) attempted to give an analytical edge to its summary of the Keating victory. It described the new ethos of the Labor Party in the 1990s as "a synthesis of managed economic reform and a traditional Australian commitment to social justice and egalitarianism". Labor's continued occupation of the middle ground in Australian politics also had a "knock-on effect" which "sent the free-market Liberals to the political margins". In short Labor's strategists were able to harness working class sentiment to their advantage, almost without the media noticing. In an interesting assessment of the campaign in the advertising industry weekly, *AdNews*, Penny

Warneford suggests it wasn't advertising or the press, but Labor's "grass-roots" campaign that got them over the line on March 13th:

The heart of the ALP's effort was not advertising, however, but grass-roots, personalised direct mail and door-knock campaigns run on an electorate-by-electorate basis by the party, with the help of the ACTU in marginal seats. (Warneford 1993, p.15)

In other words, a class-based mobilisation of its trade union support, rather than advertising which, according to the ALP's own ad-guru, John Singleton, "did not play a major part" (cited in Warneford 1993, p.15).

Columnists: the pillars of society?

It seems that sometime during the 1990/91 recession the Canberra Parliamentary Press Gallery came to an almost collective opinion that Labor could not win the next Federal election. This herd view prevailed during the final stages of Bob Hawke's prime ministership and throughout Paul Keating's occupancy of the Lodge right up until the initial results of the Saturday 13 March 1993 election. (Henderson 1993b p.3)

While a certain conservative bias might be expected in editorials, what about columnists and leader-writers in the mainstream press? Following the analysis of Buckridge (1998) we can suggest that the grey collar perspective is weaker towards the top of the hierarchy in the news organisations. Krause (1971, pp.272-273) also comments on the conservatising pressure that the privilege of specialisation and autonomy brings to bear in occupational fragmentation. We might then conjecture that newswriters expressing the emotional attitudes of the grey collar journalist to be pro-Labor. Some undoubtedly were sympathetic to the ALP in 1993 (and other elections), but this general rule does not appear to apply to business and economics writers who tend to follow the pro-employer line. We can see here a clear, if only implicit, thin class line in the emotional attitudes of newswriters.

Like the editorials, the business press' coverage of the 1993 election campaign offered advice to both major parties about how to deal with the recession. Instead of highlighting the personalities and the contest and trivialising issues in the

manner of the tabloids, the business press presented a much more sober assessment of the economy. This is most clearly indicated in the pages of the *Australian Financial Review* and in specialist journals such as *Business Review Weekly*.

The reasons for this can be understood by using the analysis developed in previous chapters that sees the state in a capitalist society as the 'executive committee' for the ruling class. In neo-classical and liberal theory this vital point is obscured by the rhetoric of market forces (Emy & James 1996, pp.14-16) On the other hand, as Harman points out (1993, p.12) the intervention of the modern state is crucial to the process of restructuring Capital.

It follows then that the actions of the state are the focus of critical debates about issues that impinge on different sections of Capital. The state must work out compromises and impose them in the interests of the whole ruling class. This is demonstrated by *BRW's* cover story of February 26:

Analysts and markets are buoyed by the prospect of a coalition victory. But just what will a Labor or Opposition [sic] government do for your money? (Kavanagh 1993, p.40)

Throughout the 1993 election campaign comparisons were drawn between Australia's economic performance and that of other comparable countries, both within the OECD and outside it. Business writers often pointed to the lack of economic reform in Australia, or the slow pace of reform, as being the reason Australia's economic growth lagged behind some other countries. Tim Duncan in *The Australian* (March 8) reports an analysis by the Centre for International Economics which showed Australia falling behind New Zealand and Mexico. According to Duncan's summary of the CIE paper, the reforms pushed by the Labor government over the past ten years (1983-1993) had been too slow, "tentative and limited" (Duncan 1993, p.1).

Writing in *The Bulletin*, David O'Reilly suggested that economic experts were split on the major questions of the 1993 election. The basic difference was over the pace and size of the economic reform package on offer from Labor. O'Reilly has no hesitation in suggesting that:

We have to be managers of our economy. But if we are bad managers

and rely on the rest of the world to bail us out, then it may very well be that the rest of the world will tell us what we have got to do at some point in the future. (O'Reilly 1993, p.17)

O'Reilly wrote that the new orthodoxy, as espoused by people like Ian Spicer, who was then head of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, was that old-fashioned tariff policies no longer worked and had to be replaced with a new mentality:

The answer is said to lie in making Australians save more so the nation can finance its investments. (O'Reilly 1993, p.17)

This is the language of co-option that so often appears in the work of economics writers. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, appeals to nationhood and the incorporation of all citizens into a classless mass are nothing new. Reflecting the reality of the economic crisis, David O'Reilly concluded that whatever the election outcome, the problem still had to be faced:

So how can Australians be made to save more? ...With some urgency, either Paul Keating or John Hewson will have to answer that question after March 13. (O'Reilly 1993, p.17)

You can't ignore the class struggle

The important thing that workplace activists understand is that even if our side can seem weak and divided at times, managers themselves are frightened of our power. They may sometimes give the impression of being all-powerful, but they know the limits of what they can get away with. (Bramble 1996, p.20)

An important indication of the level and intensity of class struggle can be found in the news reporting of industrial relations - not just the number and severity of strikes, but in the 'opinion' and 'advice' offered in the business media. As noted above, newswriters have an ambivalent attitude to strikes in accordance with their grey collar status. Though, as previously suggested, the emotional dialectic creates contradictory levels of consciousness that swing between a 'fair go' for workers and 'greedy unionists' and often end up in 'what's good for the country'.

In the 1993 election there appeared to be a clear choice between industrial relations models. Labor offered 'more of the same' consensus and the Coalition a 'new broom, clean sweep' reform. However, more astute commentators already knew before March 13 1993, that recent and ongoing changes in the Australian industrial relations system (such as the Accord and enterprise bargaining) were irrevocable. In his analysis of the first three years of the Accord (1983-1986), Frank Stilwell noted that it had already helped shift the "objectives and strategy of the labour movement" and would continue to present "opportunities for further changes in the capital-labour-state relationship" (Stilwell 1986, p.156).

As Shane Green wrote in *The Australian* on March 8th, by 1993 the differences between the Labor and Coalition alternatives for industrial relations policy were minor. He suggested that the election outcome would not seriously alter the shift towards enterprise bargaining:

The election of either a Keating or Hewson government will result in a strikingly similar outcome at the workplace which involves the dominance of enterprise bargaining and the death of central control over pay and conditions. (Green 1993, p.34)

Green's article is interesting because it set out the sort of deals that the ACTU had struck with the Hawke-led Labor government, basically to give away centralised wage fixing, accept enterprise bargaining and cutting the powers of the Industrial Relations Commission. Less than six weeks after the election Green's predictive analysis was shown to be accurate. Prime Minister Paul Keating announced a downgrading of Awards and the Industrial Relations Commission in a speech to the Institute of Australian Company Directors. He told the audience that unemployment would remain high, that he wanted more Enterprise deals signed and that there would be "sensible intervention" in the economy by his government (Lewis 1993, p.1).

Captain Keating to the rescue!

The *Labor* Prime Minister wanted to reassure the captain's of industry that the second Keating government would not abandon them. In a major speech to company directors in April, Keating made this clear, promising to accelerate the move to enterprise bargaining and reducing awards to the status of 'safety nets'.

The Socialist (1993b, p3) described this as "nothing more than a warmed over version of Liberal policy". This highlights the difficulty trade union members and workers generally had in coming to terms with what the ACTU and the Labor government has done over the past decade. The effective 'corporatisation' of the trade union bureaucracy through the Accord process was complete by the mid 1990s in line with international trends to steadily centralise the power of the state in capitalist society:

...through a combination of corporatist political arrangements involving [the] trade union bureaucracy, government and business, and the adoption of corporate management administrative models in the running of public services and agencies. (White 1996, pp.134-135)

This corporatist strategy was evident in the Labor government's relationships with the Canberra Press Corp and is at the heart of Derek Parker's 'courtesans' analysis (Parker 1990) and it is a criticism that Michelle Grattan was prepared to concede:

...it is valid [for Parker] to argue that "The Hawke Government's media strategy was aimed at drawing the Press Gallery into the process of corporatist government", and to observe that often the Hawke Government has been successful... (Grattan 1991, p.7)

Keating's appeals to 'class'

The industrial battlefield is familiar to election-watchers. It usually features prominently as the conservatives get stuck into Labor's links with the 'industrial dinosaurs' in the trade union movement. In the context of the recession, the assault on wages and conditions in Victoria and the uncertainty promised by John Hewson's 'radical' reform of industrial relations, the 1993 election was no exception.

In 1993 Labor's appeal to its base in the working class was effective in winning the election for the party, when it seemed that they were bound to lose. But the rhetoric of Keating was not matched by the ALP's program in office. The Labor government was compelled continue to attack workers' living standards in order to fulfil its pact with Capital. As *The Socialist* (1993b, p.5) noted:

In reality, enterprise bargaining has involved massive workplace restructuring with workers trading off jobs and hard-won working conditions in exchange for puny wage increases."

Rob White echoes the sentiments of *The Socialist* (whose politics are obvious from the name) in his incisive analysis of the "poverty of the welfare state":

It is working-class men and women of many ethnic backgrounds who are suffering the brunt of economic restructuring and welfare cuts and reconstruction. (White 1996, p.137)

Throughout the 1980s and into the 1993 election the ALP was pursuing its own agenda of economic rationalism, deregulation and dismantling of the welfare state (Hinkson 1996, p.203). This should not be surprising given the extent of the crisis assailing global capitalism during the early 1990s. Chris Harman's analysis of the recession (1993, pp.3-58) underlines the argument that the scale of the crisis would breed uncertainty and the possibility of political explosions. He argued that the strategy of pushing national economies into slump, or trying to reflate the economy through spending, meant that capitalism was "entering dangerous, unknown terrain, without even being certain there is a way out" (1993, p47). Events of the past decade bear this out; increased global insecurity, the complete collapse of economies such as Argentina; the backlash against 'globalization' and the 'mini' wars throughout parts of Europe, Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

The Sydney tabloid, *The Sun-Herald*, made the issue of economic uncertainty the cornerstone of its editorial of March 7th 1993, headlined 'A critical choice' (Clark, 1993, p.24). While generously leaving the final choice to voters, the paper's editorial notes that both Paul Keating and John Hewson:

...are broadly heading in the same direction - towards changing Australia into a benchmark economy, one that can prosper in the most fiercely competitive area in the world, the Asian-Pacific region. (Clark 1993, p.24)

The *Sun-Herald* editorial also appealed to nationalism when it implored readers to co-operate with which ever party might win, to secure "Australia's long-term future", by recognising that the restructuring of the economy means, "Australians

must accept a lower standard of living, in the short term at least" (Clark 1993, p.24)

This plea also highlights another element of the 'structuring' that occurs not just in editorials, but also in news and opinion columns.

What can simply be called an editorial 'line' is carried into the comment pages of the tabloid press. The *Telegraph Mirror*'s business columnist Terry McCrann (1993b, p.35) delivered a scathing attack on Paul Keating and Labor's poor record of economic reforms. Under the headline "Keating deserves to be crucified", McCrann attacked the Canberra Press Gallery for "uncritically" accepting as wisdom Keating's economic "nonsense".

Throughout the 1993 election campaign, the commentary in the broadsheet press broadly and unevenly reflected this climate of change - a shifting dialectic - in what is popularly known as 'the middle class'. There is recognition that the dynamics of class are likely to reassert themselves in conditions of crisis (Horin, 1993, p.15). After pointing out that tax cuts promised by both sides during the election would not benefit low income workers (many of them young women), Adele Horin commented, in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, that, "talk of a classless society rings of sentimental hogwash"(Horin 1993, p.15). Horin was the only columnist to make any explicit reference to class in the period of this study.

Adele Horin's article highlights the fact that many people, who thought themselves secure in the 'middle class', were, in 1993, anxious about their jobs, mortgages, health care, the cost of education, and their declining pay packets. What she is describing, without naming it, is the impact of Government policies designed to push the burden of the crisis on to wage and salary earners, who had been, in better times, part of the comfortable status quo providing support for the system.

In a column for *The Weekend Australian* Terry McCrann (1993a, p.31, 37) described the severity of Australia's recession in the early 1990s, and said it would get worse, "unless we face up to revolutionary change in our economic and social lifestyle." However, after taking up a column and a half to show the size of the problem, McCrann has only two lines of advice:

The simple message is that major structural change is required in the

labour market. (McCrann 1993a, p.37)

Structural 'reform' and 'deregulation' became the economic orthodoxy of the 1990s and are still looked to provide capitalism with the answers to declining rates of profit, working class restiveness and generalised crisis (Harman, p.30). Supporters of these 'solutions' believe they can be applied in almost every situation, and Australia is no exception. The press discussion of the 1993 federal election assumed the necessity of change on such a scale, and was structured around it.

Keating the cultural 'visionary'

Calls for more 'structural reform' of the economy were linked to the press debate about industrial relations. It was also linked to the issue of 'vision' and generated mountains of copy. Both John Hewson and Paul Keating claimed to have a vision of the future, one that departed radically from the past. Two well-known 'left' academics, writing in the *SMH* (March 18, p10) described Paul Keating's election strategy as:

...yet another radical vision...of restructured workplaces where training and skills development are central. It's a vision where we value our differences by using them as a resource for making links in our region and globally. (Kalantzis & Cope, 1993, p.10)

This analysis is very similar to the post-Fordist arguments of John Matthews that I discussed in an earlier chapter and reflects the Fabian rhetoric of the left wing of the Australian Labor Party throughout its history, a continuation of "their efforts for betterment in the society to which they belonged", rather than rejecting capitalism (Nairn 1989, p.7). The press anointed both leaders as 'radical' during the 1993 election campaign despite the continuity of their political lineage. Tiffen notes that this use of shorthand "interpretive epithets" by the media has the consequence of reducing public discussion of policy and makes it "always secondary to the political interpretation of it" (Tiffen 1989, p.132).

During the 1993 election, both leaders wanted to appropriate the term 'radical' and were prepared to use the media to get their point across. They managed to totally remove any link it may have had with the students of 1968, with left wing politics, or challenges to basic assumptions about how economics and social

policy might be restructured for the benefit of the working masses. When it suited him Paul Keating was quite prepared to hurl the term 'radical' at John Hewson as a term of abuse. At other times both men applied it to themselves and their policies to capture the mood that the economic crisis needs a radical solution.

The media took up the 'radical' tag and Laurie Oakes, writing in *The Bulletin*, came closest to defining it in terms of the campaign:

A coalition government would see a great deal that Australians have taken for granted turned on its head...The nation, in short, faces massive change - a shake-up more revolutionary than anything Gough Whitlam attempted. It also faces more pain, more tightening of belts, as a new government driven by strong ideology experiments with economic management. (Oakes 1993, p.16)

However it became clear that there was not that much ideological, or policy difference between the major parties. The major difference seemed to be in style. The economic rationalism of John Hewson was not new, it was the Eighties revival and adaptation of the laissez faire theories of the neo-classical economists. Its fundamental premise is no more than allowing the market a 'free hand' (Carroll 1992, pp.7-26). By the time of the 1993 election, contemporary theories of economic rationalism had been around for most of the previous 15 years and brought both Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan to power (Pusey 1991, p.3; Vintilla, Philmore & Newman 1992, p.viii). Voter opposition to economic rationalism eventually destroyed Thatcher and in 1992 disillusionment with George Bush's version of economic rationalism put Bill Clinton in the White House.

Hewson's vision had the uninspiring title of *Fightback!* and, as an instrument of economic policy, was blunt and stodgy, drawing on the language of populist nationalism (Barns 1992, p.23). On the other hand, Paul Keating's prescriptions

for economic change⁶⁰ remained slow and painful. The ALP's *One Nation* strategy was meant to provide a striking alternative and to indicate that a Keating-led ALP would use its fifth term in office to attack unemployment through more interventionist policies, reinvigorate the emotional dialectic of the nation via support for an Australian republic and "re-engage Labor's traditional constituency" (Gordon 1996, pp.217-218). Keating's 'vision' found some support among sympathetic academics who also went on to give their own interpretation of radicalism in the 1993 election:

Somehow or other the media applied the word radical to Hewson, radical meaning what is still being tried in New Zealand, what has been left behind in the US and what is faltering in Britain and Canada. If we really wanted to stay with the past we would have stayed with '80s economic rationalism. (Kalantzis & Cope, 1993, p.10)

The "sweetest victory of all"

Throughout the 1993 campaign, John Hewson was quietly, but confidently, preparing for the coalition's expected move to the Treasury benches. Instead Paul Keating was given another chance. Keating himself famously described the 1993 election win as the "sweetest victory of all" (cited in Gordon 1996, p.231). Indeed it was a remarkable win in what many pundits regarded as an unwinnable election for Labor. Michael Gordon's account in his political biography of Keating makes it clear that the campaign started badly for Labor and relied on a negative reaction to the coalition's new GST policy (Gordon 1996, pp.217-261).

There's also no doubt that Keating's unlikely win also caught many political correspondents off-guard. In the weeks that followed the election a number of Gallery journalists and others rushed into print to apologise for, or defend their predictions of the outcome (Henderson 1993b). For the first weeks of the campaign journalists were scoring the event in Hewson's favour. The first

⁶⁰ The ALP's response to the Liberal's *Fightback!* was published under the title *One Nation*. It is possible that Pauline Hanson's group were not aware of this when they launched *Pauline Hanson's One Nation* in the late 1990s.

television debate on 14 February was “regarded by journalists as a decisive victory for the leader of the Opposition” (Gordon 1996, p.238). In the end very few got it right. To some extent this is understandable, opinion polls in the last weeks of the campaign put the coalition ahead in several key states (Gordon 1996, pp.249-251).

Gerard Henderson lists several reasons for the Press Gallery’s ineptitude in guessing the result, including that senior members of the gallery found the Keating government “a bit boring” and were “subconsciously hoping for a change” (Henderson 1993b, p.3). More seriously Henderson suggests that Keating’s own ability to convince the gallery of his rationalist approach to economics meant that they were unable to see that *Fightback* was “seriously flawed - both in a general political sense and in so far as particular interest groups were concerned” (1993b, p.3). Henderson also blames “fashion” and uses the industrial relations debate to make his point:

In the mid 1980s the Gallery almost to a man and a woman, rejected the Coalition’s policy...Now, however, all has changed. These days the fashionable stance within the Gallery is to argue that the Labor Government’s decision to embrace enterprise bargaining has not gone far enough. (Henderson 1993b, p.6)

Popular explanations for Labor’s victory run from the success of Labor’s GST ‘scare campaign’, to the (belated) conclusion that any party going into an election proposing a new tax was risking defeat. Then there are the exponents of the ‘cultural victory’ theory⁶¹, who suggest that the xenophobia of John Howard⁶² and sections of the coalition, were the telling factors (Cope & Kalantzis 1993). There is some truth in the ‘cultural victory’ thesis: Keating had a very good relationship with Australia’s arts community who traditionally dislikes the conservative side of politics (Gordon 1996, p.253). As I have argued in this chapter, Keating was

⁶¹ This argument is very close to the position of the cultural theorists, which is taken up in other chapters.

⁶² Interestingly, sections of the media suggested it was Howard’s xenophobia and playing the ‘race card’ that got him over the line in a contest with Kim Beazley

able to seize an advantage and surf an emotional wave into the polling booths. He was reassuring while Hewson was scary and unknown. Keating's own assessment is that he was able to win over Labor's traditional working class base by hammering away at the coalition's policies on tax, Medicare and industrial relations - the 'bread and butter' issues facing an uncertain electorate (Gordon 1996, p.239).

The respected Labor pollster Rod Cameron told Michael Gordon that there were three reasons for Keating's win:

...the Hewson rallies⁶³ gave weight to Keating's warning of a divided society under the Liberals; the "hidden campaign" being waged by the unions and health groups finally bit, particularly among young women with children; and, perhaps perversely, the perception that Keating was certain to lose meant that a number of voters came back to him, not expecting - or perhaps wanting - their vote to change the result. (Gordon 1996, pp.255-256)

This type of analysis never strays far from the parameters of what is defined as 'politics' in a liberal-democracy like Australia. Even in the most liberal of media this is limited to "that which takes place inside, or within a short cab journey of the Palace of Westminster" (Pilger 1992, p.13). In the Australian context we can substitute Parliament House in Canberra for Westminster Palace in London. This selection process defines the 'mainstream', or in other words what is 'safe' and acceptable. It is significant, that despite class being an almost invisible construct during the campaign, the reasons advanced for Labor's victory rely almost entirely on the mobilisation of working class voters.

⁶³ In the last two weeks of the 1993 campaign John Hewson orchestrated several public rallies in major cities. The advance publicity for these events gave the trade union movement, student and other protest groups to rally and disrupt the Liberals' events. The television images were graphic in portraying the hostility of the crowd.

Of all the pundits who got the result wrong⁶⁴, Peter Smark of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, perhaps had most reason to be upset with accusations that he was a tool of the Liberal Party. He defended his even-handedness in the face of a number of complaining letters to the editor:

Like others of my generation, I was trained in a school which held that, once an election is called, a reporter tries desperately to be fair, not just on average, but within each article. (Smark 1993a, p.11)

Writing in his own defence after the election, Peter Smark said of objectivity:

What is true is that knowing both sides were loathed by many voters, I expected that revenge would prove a stronger emotion than fear. I was wrong. I'll learn from that. (Smark 1993a, p.11)

Smark cited his decision to stop criticising the federal government once Australian forces were committed to the 1991 Gulf conflict as part of his defence for 'even-handedness' during the election. Despite attacks on the "naivety of the West. [Which] risked the scorpion trap of defeating [Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein] but leaving him in power as a potential rallying point for anti-Western anger", Smark stopped criticising the government when "Australian naval force was committed". He explains it rather quaintly:

Hopelessly old-fashioned as it may be, I still believe that when your men and women are on the ground, in the air or on the sea, you don't carp.... Vietnam taught me you don't publicly undermine your own, you just try to have them brought home if the cause is wrong. (Smark 1993a, p.11)

The *SMH* column cited above is an example of what John Pilger in *Distant Voices* (1992, p.13) describes as the work of a liberal-minded journalist who becomes a guardian of social norms and attempts to strike a balance between opposing extremes. Unsure of their own position they vacillate and report on the opposing social forces that power the contradictory dialectic of their time. Pilger's acerbic comment is that such people can be relied on to protect the

⁶⁴ Gerard Henderson provides a long list of Gallery members who had predicted a coalition victory, some by as much as 10 to 15 seats (Henderson 1993b, p.9)

interests of the establishment "during difficult times, such as when established forces go to war" (1992, p.13). Smark's sentiments here, and Pilger's comments, add weight to my grey collar thesis; that any media criticism of the ruling class is bounded by the emotional dialectic of parliamentary democracy and the hegemonic ideology of the market system.

In *Distant Voices*, John Pilger notes the ahistoricism of much journalism that is "faithful to the deity of 'impartiality'". He says such work "rejects the passion and moral imagination that discern and define the nature of criminality and make honest the writing of narrative history" (1992, p.13).

The emotional dialectic: Culture or Class?

Following Labor's victory in the 1993 election, *The Australian's* editorial on March 15 advised Dr Hewson to recognise from the result that voters are not hostile to changes, but it also suggested that they are:

*...sceptical of radical change and they want leaders putting radical ideas to explain those ideas, in particular their social dimensions.
The moral for the Liberals is reforms must be pitched with a positive appeal to mainstream values.*

A different attempt to evaluate the election result was presented by Dr Mary Kalantzis and Dr Bill Cope writing in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (March 18). They attempted to explain Keating's victory by arguing that in the glare of the numbers games being played by the party machines and the media, issues such as women, multiculturalism, nationalism, Aboriginal reconciliation and Australia's relationship with Asia were displaced. They argued that the people who ultimately delivered Paul Keating to the Lodge for three more years were ethnic groups, Aborigines, "and those who believe in multiculturalism" (Kalantzis & Cope 1993, p.18).

Kalantzis and Cope surveyed some of the leading non-English media in Sydney and argued that some of Australia's larger ethnic communities were committed to Labor, but because of cultural blind spots in the mainstream media none of this ever got further than the ethnic press. Kalantzis and Cope also suggested that the Opposition's perceived antagonism towards multiculturalism cost them the

1987 and 1990 elections too. They even suggested that multiculturalism was "more decisive [than the GST and other factors] in the final result". However, I feel that Kalantzis and Cope went out on a limb into unsustainable wishful thinking when they wrote:

If, despite the million unemployed, Australians voted for cultural vision and cultural change, then that was truly radical. (Kalantzis & Cope 1993, p.18)

Despite the weight of numbers in the combined ethnic vote and the anecdotal evidence that the majority would have supported Labor, it is fanciful to think that cultural vision was much of an issue in this election on its own. However, combined with Paul Keating's appeal to the emergent cultural dialectic of 'new' nationalism - as typified by his comments on the republic - it proved very powerful. While it is true to say that on the whole the media does forget to talk to minority groups and the dispossessed⁶⁵: economics, unemployment, health care and tax were the major issues in the 1993 election. I would suggest that voters from non-English speaking backgrounds were just as concerned about these core issues as the so-called 'mainstream'. That is they were drawn in by the implicit class dialectic of Keating's campaign.

Like many politicians before them, and many since, in 1993 Keating and Hewson both cynically draped themselves in the flag during the campaign, though Keating was careful to excise the union jack from the backdrop of his Baz Luhrman designed campaign launch set. During the campaign, attempts were made by advisers in the Keating camp to marginalise the issue of republicanism⁶⁶. According to Michael Gordon, this was done because of the risk it might detract from the main message: which party could better address economic issues such as unemployment (Gordon 1996, p.241). However, the fact that Keating insisted on raising his republican 'vision', as an obvious contrast

⁶⁵ For a discussion of this issue in relation to reporting of western Sydney refer to Castillo & Hirst 2001.

⁶⁶ See below Chapter 6: *Where were you on November 11?*

with the Coalition, is certainly noteworthy given Keating's strong push for a republic during his last term in office.

Kalantzis and Cope base their defence of the Labor Party on its "better intuitive feel for this country's developing sense of itself". I believe that this argument disguises the real use of nationhood, national interest, nationalism, and jingoism to ultimately defend the interests of Australia's ruling class. The Labor Party shares with the conservative forces in Australian politics a desire to ensure that national class privilege is protected from internal threat (from below), and external threat from other competing ruling classes⁶⁷. In 1993 Keating was able to finesse this contradiction in ALP ideology (nation versus class) through class collaboration and corporatist strategies, in which he was ably assisted by the ACTU and the trade union bureaucracy.

Perhaps Kalantzis and Cope's most glaring political mistake is to provide a 'left' cover for the Labor Party's massive restructuring of the Australian economy and the misery it created for 'ordinary' Australians. This mistaken analysis relies on 'cultural' forces divorced from any economic or social context:

Despite the economic gloom of the present, the Australian imagination was taken by this vision for a different and better future. Culture made the difference in this election. Now the job is to make the cultural vision real. (Kalantzis & Cope 1993, p.18)

I believe that, in their rush to provide the cultural dimension to the election result, Kalantzis and Cope fell into the trap of 'left nationalism', which has destroyed the Communist Party of Australia and continues to disorient many activists today. This is a serious charge to level and begins to give my thesis its polemic edge. Some may argue that is perhaps 'unbecoming' in academic writing, but I am keen to debate these points in some detail because I think it is important to rescue and hold onto what is good in the Kalantzis/Cope thesis.

⁶⁷ This issue is discussed in Chapter 4: *The ties that bind*.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have theorised and explained the class nature of the Australian media in terms of the journalism of politics. It is clear that various media outlets use imprecise sociological tools, such as demographic profiling, to articulate a relationship to their audience. To a large degree this is a marketing tool (Day 2001, p.4) and is never explicitly talked about in terms of a 'class' analysis. However, I have shown that the tabloid media presumes a largely working class audience and that the more 'upmarket' broadsheet media pitches at a professional and 'middle class' audience.

This chapter has also demonstrated, using the example of the 1993 federal election campaign, that grey collar journalists have an ambivalent attitude towards class and tend not to rely on it as an intellectual concept in their construction of news values. The dominant emotional dialectic for political reporting continues to be the 'national interest' (as discussed in the previous chapter) and rarely does the true class nature of society intrude into political reporting. My brief reference to the 1998 maritime dispute and the archaeological digging I've done on 'class' issues in the press confirms this. It was noted that during the maritime dispute, the journalists themselves argued from a position of the 'myth of objectivity' and drew poor conclusions from their experiences of reporting from the very front line of the class struggle (Baker & Oakham 1999).

I have suggested that class was an implicit category in the 1993 federal election, but one that was largely ignored by the media. Instead they relied on the coding of issues in terms of the national interest, 'structural reform' and industrial relations - all of which are ultimately issues of class versus nation. My analysis shows how Paul Keating was able to harness this contradictory dialectic to his advantage through the strategic dimensions of corporatism and class collaboration, which are the hallmarks of the modern Labor Party.

Finally I have alluded to one of the important themes taken up in later chapters: the failure of a purely cultural analysis to adequately deal with complex class issues when talking about the Australian media. Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis attempted to provide a culturally-determinist explanation for Labor's win in the

1993 election that cannot adequately explain why the working class accepted the compromise that Labor offered ('we're not the Liberals').

Chapter 6

Where were you on November 11? Generational change in the media ranks

Well, I was right here in [old Parliament House] I had been up here until about 1 AM the night before. I was back in by about 9 AM because we got the feeling that something was going to happen...[It] was in the Vice-Regal Notices that [Shadow Attorney-General] Barwick had had lunch with [Governor-General, John] Kerr and the vibes were around that it was going to be quite a day. (Wally Brown, Pers. Comm. 12 February 1998)

A defining moment in the emotional dialectic

There's no doubt that November 11 1975 will long be remembered as one of the defining moments of Australia's political history. The sacking of Gough Whitlam's Labor government by the Governor-General sparked a political crisis of unprecedented proportions and the reverberations are still being felt in national politics nearly 25 years later. In terms of the grey collar thesis it is, without doubt, one of the defining moments in establishing the emotional dialectic of Australian political journalism.

This chapter outlines, how, for journalists working on that day, it became one of the most important stories of their lives and for subsequent generations of journalists it provides a benchmark against which other momentous political events can be measured.

This chapter argues that the debate about Australia's slow march towards a republic crosses the boundaries of traditional reporting about politics, to embrace

the whole of popular culture. It is as much about redefining 'who we are' as Australians as it is about changing the Head of State, or the Constitution. Journalists and columnists are at the cutting edge, popularising the arguments for and against the republic. This chapter answers the questions: What are newswriters saying? and Why?

The press, Nation-State and popular culture

Colin Mercer (1992) has theorised the relationship between popular culture and the Nation-State, and the implications in this, "for the ways in which the cultural history of the newspaper is to be approached" (Mercer, 1992, p.27). He describes three "transactions", which the popular press enables to take place in the negotiation of consent:

...an operation of classification and delineation of diverse phenomena; an operation enabling forms of social identity and affiliation -- a 'specific way of being in the world - to be established; and an operation which establishes in tangible forms the existence and arrangement of groups, classes and communities. (Mercer 1992, p.28)

Mercer locates these functions as operating with a "distinctive repertoire of images and phrases...through which the nation could regularly be imagined." (1992, p.28). In his account, newspapers particularly regulate cultural discourses at the level of the daily event in ways "which have enormous significance in cultural histories of nationhood" (Mercer 1992, p.33). It is the particular heterogeneous, "printed cultural form" of newspapers that allows them to collect and format diverse 'news' items, "and simultaneously offer politico-moral commentary on them in a way that does not cause any problems of internal incoherence, disunity of form, and so on" (Mercer 1992, p.36). Newspapers are convenient and efficient articulators of these national cultural forms precisely because the nation is the terrain across which they circulate. Mercer writes that the modern newspaper:

...is a crucial device and cultural technology through which a certain sense of the national community may be inscribed. (Mercer 1992, p.39)

The analysis in this chapter suggests that newspapers constitute an important site for articulation of the republic debate. It becomes even more apparent when it is shown that the common thread in the republic debate is nationalism and the *forging* of a new national ideology.

***The historical determination of an emotional dialectic
- 'new' nationalism***

This chapter examines two inter-linked, but distinct, propositions. The first is that historical precedents frame the print media's coverage of political crisis and that the events of November 11 1975 constitute a precedent par excellence. The second is that journalists' memories of 1975, whether real, or passed down via study or peers, are an important marker of generational change and difference among them. This chapter looks at the question of how emotional attitudes might be transmitted inter-generationally in the closed, 'hot house' atmosphere of the Canberra Press Gallery. There is no doubt that '1975' is remembered and interpreted in the context of the dialectic of the front-page on a semi-regular basis.

For example, this chapter examines how the emotional dialectic of a 'remembered' November 1975 is reflected in, and helped to shape the print media's coverage of the 1998 Constitutional Convention, held in old Parliament House, Canberra, the scene of the November '75 events. It then links this content analysis to a series of interviews conducted with Press Gallery journalists who were covering the convention. Each interview starts with the question: "Where were you on November 11?" The answers provide an interesting way of categorising gallery journalists by an age cohort.

Finally this chapter suggests that young reporters learn 'history' in many ways, some formal – in the classroom or lecture hall – and some informal – by socialising and on-the-job. If we cannot strengthen and support the learning of those at the beginning of their careers perhaps the culture of journalism will continue to fail those it is meant to serve – all of us.

**November 11, 1975:
A benchmark for journalists' 'risk analysis'**

'Ladies and gentlemen well may we say "God save the Queen,"

because nothing will save the Governor-General.'

This has become perhaps the most famous 'sound bite' in Australian politics. They are the words of Gough Whitlam addressing a crowd gathered on the front steps of Parliament House, Canberra, after hearing the news of Labor's dismissal by Governor-General, Sir John Kerr in the early afternoon of 11/11/75.

Almost every Australian is aware of the events of November 11 1975 and most citizens over 35 probably have a strong opinion about Whitlam's sacking. Many 'baby-boomers' and the generation that followed them – let's call them 'space-racers' – can still entertain their friends with stories of their whereabouts and actions on that fateful day. In an interview with *The Australian's* Claire Harvey during the February 1998 Constitutional Convention, Australians for a Constitutional Monarchy (ACM) executive director Kerry Jones said that Whitlam's dismissal first made her think about the constitution (Harvey 1998a, p.7).

During the first week of the convention, in February 1998, *Age* reporter John Elder spoke to striking dockworkers about the convention. They too were happy to talk about November 11 1975. Opinion ranged from disinterest to "The Queen's done nothing for us":

Jimmy McNamara, 39, from Swanston East Dock, is a republican and a union rep. "I don't believe a representative of the Queen should have the power to sack the government upon the urgings of an interested party." McNamara was 17 years old in 1975. (Elder 1998a, p.6)

In 1995 when the 20th anniversary of the Whitlam sacking was 'celebrated' *Sun-Herald* columnist Alex Mitchell asked 11 people where they were at the time of the sacking. Comments ranged from: "The effect it had on me, apart from transforming my 17th birthday party into a major wake, was to turn me into a passionate republican" (novelist Kathy Lette), to "Whitlam and his colleagues converted me to the Liberal Party" (Pat Daley, founder of Neighbourhood Watch) (Cited in Mitchell 1995, pp.14-15).

There's no doubt that November 11 1975 will long be remembered as one of Australia's most dangerous periods of political crisis. Tens of thousands of

unionists rallied, marched and protested around the country. Only the intervention of then ACTU leader Bob Hawke, and Whitlam himself, prevented the building of a national strike against Kerr's actions and the caretaker Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser (Griffiths 1997). The constitutional crisis is also a benchmark against which all subsequent political crises are measured and there's no doubt it has become part of Australia's journalistic folklore.

Through their work of remembering and analysing, journalists play a central role in the media's construction of an idealised and reconstituted national public sphere (Poole 1989), across the territory marked out by the distribution patterns of newspapers (Mercer 1992) and national broadcasting networks. This implies that a Nation-State's continuing negotiation of 'risk' and relations with 'citizens' can be approached through an analysis of media accounts of politically significant events and debates. The media participates in and helps regulate political and cultural discourse at the level of daily news occurrences in ways 'which have enormous significance in cultural histories of nationhood' (Mercer 1992, p.33). The mediated 'public sphere' is politically and ideologically tied to the interests of the Nation-State (Poole 1989) and this relationship is itself mediated by political journalism and commentary (Tiffen 1989). Following this analysis I consider the public sphere the terrain across which the emotional dialectic is articulated, contested and synthesised. In particular it finds a concrete expression in the media as the *dialectic of the front-page*.

***The dialectic of the front-page:
The 'risky business of history and remembering***

The first proposition explored in this chapter is that historical precedent and memories of previous similar episodes frame the media's coverage of events involving political 'risk'. Recent work on the social construction of 'risk' in media discourse (Stallings 1990) concentrates on 'natural' and 'man-made' disasters. Much of the 'risk' literature is concerned with individual behaviour, or ecological and technical 'risks' facing society (Hansson 1989; Beck 1992). This chapter applies some insights from this field to the study of political 'risk'. Lloyd Chiasson (1995) and Raboy and Dagenais (1992) have edited volumes on the topic of media and risk, both are relevant to this discussion.

For the purpose of this chapter I define ‘historical precedent’ as a journalistic device incorporating a reference to a previous event and suggesting it has significance in the context of current debates and the daily news agenda. For example, in discussing John Kerr’s dismissal of Whitlam in 1975, Paul Kelly compares it to the precedent set by Sir Phillip Game’s dismissal of NSW Premier Jack Lang in 1932 (Kelly 1995, p.134).

The second and linked proposition is that reporters’ interpretations of 1975 vary, depending on personal political conviction and, to some extent, according to age and experience. This represents an exposition of my previous comments about the shifting and contradictory nature of the emotional attitudes of newswriters. My interviews with Press Gallery journalists, conducted during the ‘Con Con’ in February 1998, highlight these differences and go some way to explaining the various ‘generation gaps’ evident among Australia’s most powerful political reporters and commentators. I believe that responses to my question: “Where were you on November 11?” provide a useful guide to the generational make up and the hierarchy of the Canberra press gallery.

In her book *Fit to Print*, an outsider’s glimpse into the workings of the Press Gallery, Margaret Simons says there are three levels of inhabitants – the “Young and the Restless”; the “heavy-hitters” and the “gallery leaders”, whom she also refers to as ‘the ex-God correspondents’ (Simons 1999, p.23). According to Simons there’s only “a small amount of disagreement about who belongs to which level” when you ask gallery members and political minders “to describe the stratification” of the gallery (Simons 1999, p.23). While I am in general agreement with this breakdown, I believe the situation is perhaps a little more complex than Simons’ informants have suggested.

The ‘risky’ republic?

Those opposing the election of a president fear that if the winner started to exert the powers the Constitution seems to give, we would find ourselves like France and the United States, caught in tugs-of-war between president and parliament. (Marr 1998, p.9)

The ‘republican’ discussion is set against the background of heightened tension between governments and media institutions during periods of ‘political crisis’:

for example general elections and crises of ‘legitimation’ (Keane 1992), or ‘emotional’ issues such as Royal Commissions (Turner 1993). Australia’s ‘celebration’ of its bicentenary in 1988 was also marked by ‘disturbance’, creating a crisis situation (Mercer 1992) and since its arrival on the political scene, in the run up to the 1993 federal election, the republic debate has also been couched in terms of ‘risk’ and uncertainty (Hudson & Carter 1993).

Ingles suggests the ‘pseudo-synonyms’ ‘hazard’, ‘danger’ and ‘peril’ as important signifiers for the concept of ‘risk’, along with ‘errors, blunders, faults and mistakes’ (Ingles 1991, p.67). A close analysis of the reportage of the republic debate (Hirst 1995) indicates that these ‘pseudo-synonyms’ are used to describe Whitlam’s dismissal in the context of the role and powers of a republican Head of State. Such synonymous language is also evident in discussion of the role of the Senate in a republican Australia and the method of selecting a replacement for the Governor-General - either by recommendation to the Prime Minister, or by popular election.

The media and ‘crisis’

Brasch and Ulloth (1986) approach the relationship between media institutions and the Nation-State from the perspective of legal, social, political and moral controls placed on the circulation of information by those in power. Such controls are “characterised by government’s desire to exercise the most authoritarian restraints and by the conflicting demands of independent thinkers to loosen by some degrees those controls” (Brasch & Ulloth 1986, p.xii). In short, Nation-States attempt to manage any real, or potential, ‘risk’ to their continued existence and exercise of power by controlling the language of reporting about their actions.

In recent studies Avery (1995) examines how the American press became caught up in the conflict over an emerging national identity during crisis periods in the 19th century. Similarly, Chiasson suggests the American press has “led public opinion...mirrored attitudes, and sometimes set the agenda after public opinion has crystallised” as times have demanded (1995, p.ix). Hallin (1986) has discussed splits over Vietnam in the sixties within the US elite in a similar way. Hallin’s more recent work (1994) highlights the ambivalent attitudes of American journalism towards other policy crises of the Nation-State. Such

ambivalence can manifest itself as an oppositional voice at such times of ideological and political uncertainty. British media sociologist Brian McNair (1998) calls this journalistic response “mass cultural information chaos”.

Each of these writers is commenting on what I have named as the emotional dialectic of an epoch. In particular how this is ‘played’ in the media during times of political crisis and uncertainty as the dialectic of the front-page. ‘Risk’ in this context refers to potential and actual challenges to the hegemonic discourse of liberal-democratic politics and the free market.

Dancing around the sphere of consensus

At the same time as individual members of elites have become more exposed to journalistic scrutiny, governmental decision-making has had to become more accountable and responsive, simply because it is more widely and rapidly reported than ever before (McNair 1998, p.30). At the same time McNair is quick to remind us that “liberal journalism is biased towards capitalism in general – as the form of economic, social and political organisation within which it has developed” (1998, p.31). In the ‘dance’ of the dialectic media and governments circle each other locked in a distrustful embrace. In the end reporting does not often move beyond the bounds of what Hallin (1986; 1994) calls the spheres of “consensus”, “limited controversy” and “deviance”:

All of these spheres, of course, have internal gradations, and the boundaries between them are fuzzy. Within the sphere of legitimate controversy, for instance, the practice of objective journalism varies considerably. Near the [internal] border of the sphere of consensus journalists practice the kind of objective journalism that involves a straight recitation of official statements; farther out in the sphere of controversy they become willing to balance official statements with reactions from the opposition or with independent investigations of controversial issues. (Hallin 1994, p.54)

The more controversial the issue, the more divided elite and ‘public’ opinion; the more tending towards crisis, the more likely it is that journalists will report (and comment upon) differences - the more open they are to ‘risky’ interpretations. The debate about republicanism and the issue of a republican Head of State is

hovering in the outer limits of the sphere of limited controversy. However, 'limited' it is and John Pilger (1992) accurately portrays these limits "within a certain framework":

As represented by Question Time on television and the Today programme on radio, where 'politics' is defined by what takes place inside, or within a short cab journey of the Palace of Westminster. In this way, journalists, politicians and other establishment representatives promote each other's agendas. This is known as 'the mainstream'. (Pilger 1992, pp.13-14)

Here Pilger is talking about London, but we can substitute the circular precincts around Parliament House (old and new) in Canberra and the effect is the same. The events of 1975 have almost exclusively come to be remembered in this way. While the protests are fondly remembered by those who took part, most 'histories' of the constitutional crisis "typically mention massive demonstrations and large, passionate election meetings, but say little or nothing about trade union action" (Griffiths 1997, p.1). This spherical bounding was abundantly evident in the reporting of Con Con when 'controversial' republican figures, such as Moira Rayner, Phil Cleary and Pat O'Shane, were marginalised, patronised and ridiculed in the 'mainstream' media.

In general, recent studies of political journalism in Australia have not made much use of the 'risk' approach, nor have they taken much notice of Hallin's analysis of 'limited controversy'. One exception is Graeme Turner's paper on media constructions of the Maralinga Royal Commission which notes Paul Keating's masterly use of historical precedent in a discourse linking national identity, political risk and opportunity (Turner 1993, p.120).

Most Australian writing on political reporting is either of the 'conspiracy theory' type (Foley & Wilson 1990; Parker 1990), or in the style of histories and biographies (Mills 1993), or 'war stories' by former 'insiders' (Lloyd & Clark 1976; Lloyd 1988; Richardson 1994). However, journalists' memoirs and their occasional book-length treatments of events like the constitutional crisis (Kelly 1976; Oakes 1976; Kelly 1995) provide a rich source of information about their

attitudes to both November 1975 and the use of historical precedents as tool for interpreting other moments of risk and crisis.

11 November 1975: The 'unresolved' crisis of Australian politics

The 1975 political and constitutional crisis was a product not only of the contest between the Labor government and the Liberal-Country Party opposition but also of competing views of Australian democracy. The underlying issues raised by the crisis remain unresolved today. They are merely disguised by the current debate over federalism, republicanism and individual rights. As Australia approaches its centenary of Federation in 2001 and contemplates changes to its democracy to reflect a growing national confidence, the legacy of 1975 hangs like a skeleton in its constitutional cupboard out of sight but still denied interment. (Kelly 1995, p.1)

This opening gambit from the then international editor of *The Australian* newspaper, Paul Kelly, highlights perfectly the accepted wisdom of a generation - that the political crisis of November 1975 remains unfinished business more than 25 years after the event. Certainly the period of the Keating government (1993-96) and the legacy inherited by John Howard after the 1996 election confirms Kelly's analysis. Any number of books, articles, columns and editorials confirm the essential facts: for good or bad the shadow of 1975 hangs over contemporary political debates about the Republic, the constitution, the nature of Australian 'democracy' and 'our' national identity. In a sense it is the core contradiction in what I have termed the emerging emotional dialectic of 'new' republican nationalism at the end of the 20th Century. In my view this is a useful explanatory framework for the failure of the Howard referendum on the republic issue in the year following Con Con.

This chapter does not examine the role of the media in the constitutional crisis, though it's clear that Malcolm Fraser was cognisant of the role 'good' coverage could play in his bid for power and saw the media "as an integral part of the political process" (Kelly 1976, p.152). Kelly also notes that many in Australia's business, rural and media 'elites' felt in November 1975 that the ALP was unfit

to govern (1995, p.30). What's of greater concern here is to analyse how, in the quarter century since the dismissal, '1975' is used iconically to denote 'crisis' and instability and has become an interpretive and reflective mechanism in current political reportage. '1975' is firmly attached to the emotional attitudes of several current generations of political correspondents. This may change in the new century as the older generations retire and the 'young guns' come into their own.

Iconic 'moments': Framing the emotional dialectic of 1975

My analysis of several key texts on the dismissal, notably those by journalists, and fringe players, has located several 'motifs' that recur and are used as explanatory arguments for what happened. I will briefly comment on each of them before proceeding to a discussion of the February 1998 Constitutional Convention where they were again activated in a bid by those covering it to make sense of the two-week debate.

Iconic 'moments' #1: Whitlam's rage against the Constitution

Fraser could effectively argue that everything he said about the Whitlam government was correct. The governor-general had proved it: he had been forced to dismiss Whitlam to uphold the constitution.
(Kelly 1976, p.304)

Long-time Canberra-watcher, Paul Kelly (1976; 1995) has suggested that, as Prime Minister and Labor leader, Gough Whitlam had a great desire to radically alter the constitution, which he believed was inherently and permanently debilitating to the Labor side of politics. In Kelly's view Whitlam's approach to government orbited around his desire to alter the balance of power by changing the constitution in practice, if not in words.

The corollary, of course, is that the conservative parties were determined to thwart Whitlam at every turn. This position has been 'updated' by the monarchists who throughout the late 1990s insisted that Paul Keating, like Whitlam, wanted to wreck the Australian constitution. In a sense the republican 'mainstream' was forced to adopt the so-called 'minimalist' position in an attempt to neutralise this attack.

***Iconic moments #2:
The three year crisis***

It could be argued that the Labor Government had never had a real sense of direction in the economic area anyway...it had given inadequate thought to the economy. There was no vision there.
(Oakes 1976, p.115)

After studying, in some detail, the classic texts covering November 1975 it is obvious that the whole period of the Whitlam government (1972-75) was one of real, imagined and, in some instances, manufactured crisis (Oakes 1976; Lloyd & Clark 1976). Almost from the first day of Whitlam's 'two man' cabinet (himself and Lance Barnard) there was a determination by the coalition to bring him and his government undone. For three years and under two different leaders (Snedden and Fraser) the opposition manoeuvred, plotted and probed in order to secure an election that would cut Whitlam down to size.

***Iconic 'moments' #3
Whitlam took 'risks' with the economy***

The 18-month term of the second Whitlam Government was a period of economic derangement and dishevelment unsurpassed in Australian politics since the great depression. (Lloyd & Clark 1976, p.94)

Even the sober assessment of Clem Lloyd, a former adviser to then Treasurer Bill Hayden, is that the economic background noise and risky strategies on prices and incomes control brought Whitlam undone (Lloyd & Clark 1976, pp.85-113). Whitlam's 'reformist' approach led to increased government spending when "in conventional terms, the conduct of economic management called for restraint and the encouragement of a gradual economic recovery" (Lloyd & Clark 1976, p.86). Then in the second half of its term the Whitlam government was faced with a "wages explosion" and "a period of economic derangement and dishevelment unsurpassed in Australian politics since the great depression" (Lloyd & Clark 1976, p.94). Here we see the classic 'pseudo-synonyms' for 'crisis' come to the fore – "explosion", "derangement" and "dishevelment", as well as the telling precedent "since the great depression". By the journalistic standards employed

by Lloyd and Clark, the Whitlam experiment was as bad as the depression of the 1930s - a comparison many in the electorate were prepared to consider too.

***Iconic 'moments' #4
Whitlam was 'incompetent'***

Economic policy was one arm of the Labor Government's demoralization and downfall; its image of incompetence was the other. (Lloyd & Clark 1976, p.114)

Clem Lloyd and Andrew Clark (1976) devoted a whole chapter to discussing the perceptions and allegations that Whitlam and his senior ministers were incompetent. They focus on the sackings of Lance Barnard, Frank Crean, Rex Connor and Jim Cairns in 1974 and 1975. That Whitlam was politically naive is perhaps understandable given the long period of conservative rule prior to 1972, no one in the Whitlam cabinet had experience of being in government. There's also ample evidence that the handling of the 'Kemlhani loans' affair and Jim Cairns' unconventional relationship with his 'adviser' Junie Morosi were 'incompetent'. The lack of communication between Whitlam and his senior colleagues also 'explains much of the genesis of the loans affair, which brought Whitlam Cairns and Connor together in a tragic denouement' (Lloyd & Clark 1976, p.137). The 'line' about incompetence is one of the most enduring memories of the Whitlam period. So much so that in an editorial on the 25th anniversary of Whitlam's election, *The Weekend Australian* leader writer could intone "the Whitlam administration proved among the most undisciplined seen in Australia" (*The Weekend Australian*, 29-30 November 1997).

***Iconic 'moments' #5
'Crash through or crash'***

Whitlam crashed. He could never regain the stature he had once enjoyed. (Oakes 1976, p.295)

In fact, both Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser have survived long enough to have been rehabilitated after the events of 1975. They both now enjoy the status of elder statesmen and they have even appeared together at political events. Both are republicans and both have made courageous statements in support of asylum-seekers. Fraser has so offended John Howard in recent times that the men no

longer speak to each other and Fraser has threatened to resign from the Liberal Party. Something that John Howard would probably welcome.

“Crash through or crash” is the title of Laurie Oakes’ seminal book about the Whitlam government (1976) and senior journalist Paul Kelly often uses this phrase to describe Whitlam’s attitude to obstacles in the way of his historic mission to reform the constitution and politics more generally. Whitlam was well known for often opting to ‘tough it out’ when compromise might have been the most sensible course (Oakes 1976, p.172). Gough Whitlam is often portrayed as a patrician character, larger than life, arrogant and with a “dogmatic style” (Kelly 1995, p.144) and who failed to consider the implications of ‘toughing it out’ and ultimately misread the situation in the crucial days and hours before Kerr acted on the morning of November 11. “These blunders involved, ultimately, failure to consider Kerr’s character and motivation” (Kelly 1995, p.150).

Iconic ‘moments’ #6

‘Risk’ can be measured through public opinion polling

The immediate voter reaction to the crisis was to sympathise with Whitlam and to be apprehensive about Fraser’s action. This was documented in public opinion polls throughout the crisis. (Kelly 1995, p.153)

Opinion polling is an important tool of political analysis, in the days of so-called ‘push polling’⁶⁸ increasingly so. In June 1995, following a major speech on the republic by Prime Minister Keating, opinion polls were showing majority support for the direct election of the Head of State (Kitney 1995, p.6). This has been a consistent feature of the debate ever since, but was hijacked and ultimately ignored during Con Con.

When Keating decided to push hard on the republic as a ‘second line’ issue in the build up to the March 1996 federal election the ALP’s senior pollster, Rod Cameron told Michael Gordon (1995, p.24): “There are no votes to be lost for

⁶⁸ Push-polling is the tactic of ringing voters during an election campaign and telling them things about the candidates, such as “X is a homosexual. Knowing that would you still vote for her?” It has been used by both major parties in recent elections and while it is ethically frowned upon and both sides deny it, it is becoming an increasingly popular ‘direct-sell’ campaign methodology.

Labor on this – the question is whether there are votes to be won. I suspect that there are.” Gordon went on to assess the risks to both the ALP and the Liberals of Keating’s bold strategy. Firstly, Keating must strike a “fine balance” between the “risk of being seen as obsessed” and the “risk of alienating support” if the republican cause becomes a “party political issue”. At the same time there were “two dangers for the Opposition and its leader”: the first is Howard’s support for the monarchy will “reinforce the do-nothing image”, then the coalition too “risks alienating support” if it tries to block a popular move as portrayed in the positive polling on the republic (Gordon 1995, p.24).

Iconic ‘moments’ #7
Parallels between Keating and Whitlam

The piquancy of the evening was not lost on those who had paid for the privilege of being there. Here was Keating, whose first ministerial experience was severed after just three weeks by the dismissal of the Whitlam government, being handed the Whitlam mantle; but facing the prospect of a very short time to do something with it. (Gordon 1996, pp.45-46)

Gordon is writing about a 1992 dinner to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Whitlam government’s election in 1972. Whitlam had just praised Keating as one of only two Labor prime ministers who had achieved important gains - the other was himself (Gordon 1996, p.45). If this was a self-serving comparison, it also serves to highlight an aspect of enduring political folklore.

Paul Keating and Gough Whitlam both held office for three years, both served two terms, and like Whitlam, Keating’s vision was based on a strong sense of Australian national identity and national destiny. Keating unleashed the republican ‘genie’ but it’s fair to say he never really controlled it. In his attitude towards the republic Keating adopted a typically Whitlamesque pose: ‘crash through or crash’. The opposition was able to focus on this and brand republicanism as Keating’s personal and secret agenda for eventual dictatorship. Keating’s ‘minimalism’ – simply replacing the Governor-General with an appointed ‘President’ – also managed to alienate a large number of his supporters in the more radical wing of the republican movement.

Whitlam adopted a risk-laden strategy towards Fraser and Kerr in 1975 and the media's assessment of the republic debate during the Keating years was that it involved an element of risk for both parties. An editorial in *The Canberra Times* in April 1993 spelled this out for then opposition leader John Hewson "the man straddling the classic barbed wire fence on the republican issue" and Keating "must tread cautiously" and not "grapple with other constitutional changes" while championing the republican cause. The leader writer gives this telling example of the greatest risk that Keating could face if he tries to 'crash through or crash':

For example to reduce the Senate powers and ensure the new head of state would not have the umpire role Sir John Kerr exercised [then] the prospects of a successful referendum would be much reduced.
(*The Canberra Times*, 30 April 1993, p.10)

Sheep in wolves' clothing: A pack mentality or convenience?

...the news judgments that the Gallery makes and the stories which it runs help establish a framework of meaning within which political events are judged and interpreted in Canberra and elsewhere. This hands the Gallery a real capacity to determine the very direction and shape of Australian political life. (Ward 1992, p.172)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is a commonplace of Australian political journalism that the Canberra Press Gallery hunts (or gathers) news as a 'pack' (Lloyd 1988; Tiffen 1989; Parker 1990). The only people who seem to deny this 'fact' are the gallery journalists themselves, most recently in Margaret Simons' account, *Fit to print* (1999):

[Sydney Morning Herald columnist Laura] Tingle denies that there is much caucusing. In her view it only happens 'perhaps among the junior journalists and the radio journalists'. But mostly the agreement [on the 'line'] comes 'because we're all watching the same things, reading the same stuff – there are only so many ways that you can write that World War II started today'. (Simons 1999, p.27)

Despite the denials there is some evidence that gallery members do discuss the 'news of the day' among themselves. For a start, with the odd exception, most gallery journalists do have 'like-minded' friends and colleagues that they converse with informally on a daily basis (Cadzow 1993, p.69). In my experience this type of 'caucusing' is inevitable, at least on public occasions when it leads to the borrowing of material and a sharing of emotional attitudes or 'news frames'. Then there's the hierarchy of the bureau – the need to report to a chief of staff or editor – that imposes a more formal discipline and control over the types of stories that are considered 'newsworthy':

Its ethos is informality but this can be deceptive since it has an unmistakable hierarchical structure. It tends to be hard working and, at the top, extremely hard working. (Kelly 1991, p.21)

On top of this are the institutional constraints: the fact that all bureaus and reporters have access to the same large pile of documents – reports, transcripts and media releases – that crowd the 'boxes' each day; and finally, the close physical proximity that being based in Parliament House imposes on all gallery members (Ward 1992). This proximity factor also makes it easier for the 'spin doctors' to move among reporters giving 'background' briefings designed to ensure a consistent position is put forward through all the major outlets (Buckley 1991; Kelly 1991). In *News and Power* (1989), political scientist Rod Tiffen summarises the effects of physical co-location and enforced socialising among the gallery reporters:

A physical centre encourages a strong social base, where reporters from different organisations mix on a daily basis. It facilitates formal information dissemination, simplifying the PR efforts of sources and helping the regular productivity of reporters. The advantages for informal information dissemination are even more marked. The regular proximity of reporters to each other and to sources allows frequent contact in a less guarded and calculating atmosphere than in formal dealings. (Tiffen 1989, p.33)

Television and radio bureaus often engage in the exchange of tape and work under informal arrangements to 'cover' for each other, especially on busy days

when it's impossible to be in two places at once. However this cooperation doesn't extend to stories where a journalist has a 'scoop', even in television. Channel 7's Rob Rashke explains that there are pre-arranged pools for TV crews, "but if it's not pre-arranged and it's a public event, then it doesn't exist" (Rashke, Pers. Comm. 1998). Under normal conditions, Rashke says, "if they have something you haven't got [management] want to know why...and in that sense television is just as every bit as competitive as print".

Courtesans, Rat packs and Cutthroats

When Colston was the story it was just cutthroat to actually get different exclusive meaningful pictures of Colston... When those kinds of stories are on, all bets are off in terms of pooling or common purpose. I mean it's absolutely cutthroat. (Milne, Pers. Comm 1998)

If Tiffen declines to make any moral or political judgment about this 'information dissemination', Derek Parker is not so shy in *The courtesans* (1990). He devotes a whole chapter to the 'Rat packs and cutthroats' who inhabit the gallery. He argues that during Bob Hawke's time in the Lodge the gallery became totally besotted and sycophantic towards him and the ALP government he led. Parker charges the gallery with a lack of clarity and distance in relation to the Hawke government, going so far as to accuse them of prostituting themselves for the crumbs from Hawke's table:

Power without responsibility is the asset of the courtesan. Power without responsibility is the defining trait of the Press Gallery in the Hawke era. (Parker 1990, p.179)

Glenn Milne says Parker "had a point", there was "an unhealthy coalescing of [gallery] views around the Keating agenda". But, he says that overall the gallery is "critical of the status quo" (Pers. Comm. 1998). This is an emotional attitude typical of the grey collar Gallery journalist and it even surfaces in some of the 'pack leaders' such as Kerry O'Brien of ABC TV's *Lateline*:

So controlled and calculating is O'Brien in front of the camera that it comes as a surprise to find he's quite different away from it. Asked to describe him, his friends come up with the same word. "Passionate," says Tom Burton. "He's a true believer." (Cadzow 1993, p.69)

'Lovers', 'haters' and John Winston Howard

The press gallery's affection for Hawke was transferred to his Treasurer Paul Keating at some time in the early 1990s. Keating's economic philosophies appealed to the gallery and appeared to be close to the economic rationalists, without their cutthroat edge. The Press Gallery admired Keating's plain-speaking on economic issues with a focus on "structural change and disciplined wage outcomes" (Gordon 1993, p.77). This lasted until 1993 when Keating began to perceive that Canberra-based reporters had turned on him (Gordon 1993, p.271). The breakdown of the so-called 'Kirribilli Agreement' in 1991 and Keating's subsequently successful 'coup' against Hawke certainly divided the gallery. The lines were drawn in the columns of the major papers and in social settings as well. From memory, I would say a majority of gallery members supported Keating, but a few Hawke 'loyalists' certainly stuck to their guns.⁶⁹ *The Daily Telegraph's* Malcolm Farr says when Keating became Prime Minister he divided the gallery "into 'those that loved him' and 'those that hated him'" and eventually "even the Labor-loving leftie pack had to splinter". Malcolm Farr also thinks there is "a type of pack mentality" in the Press Gallery, or at least "there's a homogeneity of views" (Farr, Pers. Comm. 1997).

Things appear to be different since John Howard took over as PM in 1996. According to some journalists he lacks the personal charisma of a Hawke or Keating and, in the beginning, was not much liked by the gallery as a whole. Never the less he eventually won their grudging respect and the consensus now seems to be that John Howard is a dull, but competent, Prime Minister (Simons 1999, p.27). Another difference, according to Malcolm Farr, is more competition between and within bureaus, "there's just no room for someone to go along with the herd" (Farr, Pers. Comm. 1997).

It was Howard who finally delivered on the long-mooted Convention to discuss the issue of Australia becoming a republic. He promised it in the 1996 election campaign, partly as a counter to Keating's promise of a referendum if he held on to office and partly believing that he wouldn't have to deliver and thereby

⁶⁹ I was working for SBS radio in the Press Gallery in 1991 and 1992. I can vouch for the tape swapping and for the passionate arguments over 'Keating v. Hawke' during this time.

compromise his own strong conviction that the 'present arrangements' are best for all of us. However, it was John Winston Howard who presided over the opening (and closing) of the two week 'gabfest' at old Parliament House in February 1998. For 10 working days the delegates (some elected, some appointed by Howard) and the media would be cooped up in that historic building, coincidentally the stage for Whitlam's famous line about the Queen and the Governor-General – a line that many would suggest gave initial impetus to the republican movement. I decided to follow the events of that fortnight, particularly to watch the gallery. Would the close proximity of reporters and sources lead to a consensus view of the Con Con?

'Conventional reporting': How the gallery covered Con Con

It was a bright, late summer day when the 152 delegates, their retinues of advisers and the media pack gathered in old Parliament House for the opening of the Constitutional Convention on Monday 2 February 1998. On the raw numbers the declared republicans were in a small minority over all (73 out of 152), but overwhelmed the monarchists (44 declared delegates). Most interest would focus on the 53 attendees who were either 'undecided' or had not declared their voting intentions.

According to the numbers of people who came to Canberra to observe it, the Constitutional Convention was big success. 3,000 visited Parliament House on one fine Saturday during the talkfest, doubling the figure for the same day in the previous week and four times more than average on Saturday (Contractor 1998, p.5). Certainly Con Con was a drawcard for tourists, if not an indication that Australians take the whole issue of the republic very seriously. This event marked the first significant engagement between the 'public' and the emotional dialectic of republicanism.

The setting in old Parliament House was not only historically significant and nostalgic for some of the more senior politicians, ex-politicians and journalists present, it also enabled the media coverage to be well coordinated, efficiently managed and streamlined. It was, for the reporters assigned from the Press Gallery, very much like the daily routine they're habituated to. Covering the

convention itself was very much like covering Parliamentary sessions, the Gallery bureaus were each allocated space in the old press ‘quarters’ and could view the session from the gallery in the House of Representatives chamber. For the convenience of the evening news bulletins and the morning papers the major players held press conferences each day (usually at meal breaks and after the last session). There were doorstep interviews and photo opportunities, as well as a media centre that provided agendas, advice and copies of resolutions and reports. When the day’s discussions ended the delegates would adjourn to their hotels where the well-connected reporters could find them for ‘out of hours’ briefings and interviews. In short, there were very few surprises and, deliberately or not, the large media contingent was capably managed and the ‘story’ was made available in easily digestible daily chunks.

A quick sifting through the remains of the day

The methods of media archaeology can provide plenty of clues about the dialectic of the front-page that operates at an important political event like Con Con. It is a window into the ‘soul’ of Australian political journalism. As part of the research for this chapter I collated a database of newspaper articles printed in the major national and metropolitan daily newspapers during the two weeks of the Constitutional Convention. The funding available and the prohibitive cost of collecting material from the electronic media made it necessary to exclude radio and television coverage. This does not, in my opinion, impact on the validity of the results and findings, though it does, of course, exclude a vast amount of material. In my view it would not be unfair to assume that the electronic media would, by and large, ‘fall in’ with the general tone of the print media on the issue of the republic. In line with the methods of media archaeology, an appraisal of the print media coverage of Con Con can provide an acceptable degree of historical tracing and context-building for the following analysis.

The Constitutional Convention was the only show in town and attracted a large amount of media coverage. For the purposes of this chapter most of the major metropolitan⁷⁰ and nationally circulating newspapers (*The Australian* and the

⁷⁰ The mastheads readily available at the Deakin newsagency were: *The Canberra Times*; *The Sydney Morning Herald*; *The Australian* (including the weekend edition); *The Daily Telegraph*

Australian Financial Review) were collected from 2 February to 15 February. This yielded over 600⁷¹ records, including: 113 front page stories; 28 editorials; 164 opinion pieces, including columns; 19 delegate profiles; 15 pieces on historical issues to do with republicanism and 269 news stories from the inside pages. I did not count the small news briefs found in the tabloid papers, or the daily 'diary' pieces provided to keep readers abreast of the 'gossip' from Con Con.

Nine front-page stories mentioned the 1975 constitutional crisis. It was also discussed 36 times in columns and op-ed pieces, five times in editorials; 25 times in general news reports and once in a delegate profile. Ironically the delegate in question was Sir David Smith, the private secretary to Sir John Kerr in 1975 and the man who read Kerr's proclamation sacking Whitlam on the front steps of Parliament House on November 11.

The following tables indicate at a glance the tone of the coverage that was coded according to the 'attitude' each record presented to the republican and monarchist 'sides' of the debate. The initial coding was done on a five-point scale: pro or anti monarchist, pro or anti republican and neutral. I have found in previous studies that this allows greater flexibility in dealing with the raw numbers (Loo & Hirst 1995). However, for the tables dealing in percentages the tabulation has folded the pro-republican and anti-monarchist records into one column, the pro-monarchist and anti-republican into a second and maintained the count for the records coded neutral. The percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number in order to simplify the results, while maintaining their overall accuracy and integrity. *The Weekend Australian* was merged with the Monday to Saturday edition for the purpose of this tabulation.

(including the *Sunday Telegraph*); *The Herald-Sun*; *The Sun-Herald*; *The Adelaide Advertiser* and *The Courier-Mail* (Brisbane). The Perth, Darwin and Hobart papers were not readily available and have not been considered in this study.

⁷¹ A few extraneous records were coded in the database, mainly from magazines and 'incidental' sources. These records have been excluded from the tables.

Table 1: Records sorted according to masthead and coded by tone.

PR (pro-republican); AR (anti-republican); PM (pro-monarchist); AM (anti-monarchist)

Masthead	PR	AR	Neu tral	P M	A N	Tot al
<i>The Australian</i>	102	9	50	12	2	175
<i>Aust. Fin. Review</i>	30	12	16	1	2	61
<i>Syd. Morn. Herald</i>	55	4	29	1	1	90
<i>Canberra Times</i>	44	3	24	8	1	80
<i>The Age</i>	38	4	13	0	0	55
<i>Herald-Sun</i>	20	4	17	2	0	43
<i>Daily Telegraph</i>	35	4	14	3	0	56
<i>Sun-Herald</i>	5	1	1	1	0	8
<i>Adelaide Advertiser</i>	15	3	4	2	0	24
<i>Courier-Mail</i>	7	1	5	2	0	15

**Table 2:
Records sorted by masthead in terms of percentages that favoured either the republican or monarchist position.**

Masthead	%PR	%N	%PM
<i>The Australian</i>	59	29	12
<i>Aust. Fin. Review</i>	52	26	21
<i>Syd. Morn. Herald</i>	62	32	6
<i>Canberra Times</i>	56	30	14
<i>The Age</i>	69	24	7
<i>Herald-Sun</i>	47	40	14
<i>Daily Telegraph</i>	63	25	13
<i>Sun-Herald</i>	63	13	25
<i>Adelaide Advertiser</i>	63	17	21
<i>Courier-Mail</i>	47	33	20

Tables one and two indicate that overwhelmingly the print media's coverage of Con Con was favourable to the republican cause. Taken as a whole the coverage was significantly pro-republican: 58 per cent of the coverage favoured the arguments presented by the Australian Republican Movement (ARM), 29 per cent expressed no overt opinion and only 13 per cent was openly pro-monarchist. Significantly, serious coverage in the broadsheet press engaged with the historical importance of the debate and the emotional dialectics outlined in this and the previous chapter.

Discussing the 'dismissal'

Not since the Dismissal has Old Parliament House hosted a political event as closely observed as this one. (Contractor 1998, p.5)

Of the 82 records in the database that refer to the dismissal a clear majority (51) expressed a pro-republican view, only nine were supportive of the monarchists' argument and 12 expressed no open opinion. Throughout the convention the events of November 1975 were an important consideration in determining the dialectic of the front-page.

Sir John Kerr's action in 1975 was firmly in delegates' minds and mouths at the convention when discussing the reserve powers that might be allocated to a republican Head of State. Former Governor-General Bill Hayden referred to the 1975 events in his speech supporting retention of the reserve powers: "the Governor-General of the day would have to have that power (to dismiss a government)" (cited in Ramsey 1998, p.47). Hayden was scorned by his former ALP comrades John Faulkner and Gareth Evans. Faulkner replied to Hayden the following day attacking the failure of the constitution to defend an elected government in 1975 and dismissing the myth that Kerr's actions were an appropriate exercise of reserve powers. Faulkner pointed out that the Governor-General's role is to advise, warn, and consult, which did not occur in 1975 and that Kerr had refused the advice of his government.

The question of the reserve powers was an issue from the first day of Con Con. ARM leader Malcolm Turnbull expressed a willingness to compromise on the issue (Kelly 1998a, p.1; Steketee 1998a, p.1). Liberal Treasurer Peter Costello, a late declarer for the republic, said he had no hesitation in supporting the very

‘minimalist’ republican McGarvie model. His personal shift occurred due to ‘mounting community unease’ that Con Con would be stalled over the issue of the reserve powers (Millett 1998a, p.1). In his front page story *SMH* correspondent Michael Millett wrote: “The task has become too difficult because conservatives will not back Labor attempts to avoid a repeat of the 1975 constitutional crisis by removing the right of the Senate to block supply”. Treasurer Costello was reported as arguing the need for symbols to be “believable” (1998a, p.1).

However, delegates at Con Con were unwilling to take the risk that a republican Head of State would not become more powerful than the elected government if the reserve powers became enshrined in the Constitution (Wright 1998a, p.1). A knock-on effect of this was that the convention rejected the popular election of a republican president despite the fact that it was overwhelmingly popular in opinion polls taken at the start of Con Con (Marr 1998, p.9). It seems clear from the opinion polling conducted at the time that the Australian public was prepared to embrace Hallin’s (1986; 1994) sphere of deviance on the republic issue, even though the media stayed within the bounds of limited controversy.

In his front-page news and comment piece, then *SMH* senior political reporter Tony Wright wrote:

Full codification would require attention to the powers of the Senate to avert such constitutional crises as that in 1975, when the Senate’s rejection of the Government’s supply bills led to the Whitlam government’s dismissal by the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr.
(Wright 1998a, p.1)

The convention’s rejection of codification led to a split among republican delegates at the end of the first week. The ‘official’ republicans, led by ARM’s Malcolm Turnbull, favoured the Head of State being elected by a two-thirds majority of parliament while the ‘direct electionists’ were sidelined and effectively shut out of the ‘real politik’ debates in the second week. The official republicans were more inclined to do a deal with the waverers and ‘soft’ monarchists, rather than confront the ‘risk’ they perceived attached itself to

allowing ‘ordinary’ Australians a voice in choosing to elect ‘their’ republican Head of State.

Sensing that codification and the dismissal were ‘hot’ issues on the floor of Con Con and in the news pages, columnists also put their ‘two-bob’s worth’ into the public arena. The *Herald*’s John Huxley (1998a, p.8) argued that the republican movement was driven by baby boomers trying to “reverse the sacking of the Whitlam government in 1975”. Huxley reports ACM leader Kerry Jones’ accusations that the media was stereotyping constitutional monarchists as “blue-rinsed, floral-printed elderly” folk, while ignoring high profile supporters such as actor (and American citizen) Mel Gibson. Jones also believed media attacks on the monarchists were “personal” and “vicious” and went on to tell Huxley that, in her view, republican groups must unite to put forward model to be tested against present system (Huxley 1998a, p.8).

***P. P. McGuinness:
A crusty curmudgeon at the Con Con circus***

Crusty and conservative *SMH* columnist P. P. (Paddy) McGuinness wrote three pieces during the fortnight of the convention: all of them made a direct reference to 1975 and all were populist attacks on the political ‘elites’ that dominated Con Con (McGuinness 1998a,b,c). In his final piece at the end of the second week (McGuinness 1998c, p.15) he argued, with some justification, that the convention demonstrated the public’s loss of faith in politicians and what he called the “political class” would be reinforced by the outcome of the discussions. He predicted that voters would reject a republic with no direct election option available at the November 1999 referendum. Which is almost precisely what happened. It’s interesting to note that this was one of the few direct references to ‘class’ in the coverage and the loose usage of ‘class’ in this context is typical not only of McGuinness, but also of reporters generally.

McGuinness went on to argue that “dire warnings and the scare stories” about the perceived dangers of direct election had “no substance” and were “political science fiction.” He discussed the French situation where, with a directly elected president, power has shifted from president to parliament in recent years:

*we could without any difficulty have a directly elected president with
the same usually ceremonial functions as our Governor General and*

much the same reserve powers. But the old warriors still fighting the battles of 1975 cannot bear this thought. (McGuinness 1998c, p.15)

McGuinness was highly critical of what he calls the “hidden agenda” of the ARM to enhance the power of ‘political elites, activists, lawyers, media, [and] peddlers of influence’ (McGuinness 1998c, p.15). Paddy McGuinness is not concerned that the reserve powers necessarily pose as much of a risk to the body politic as the threat looming if the power of political elites is not curtailed.

No surprises here

Given what we know about the political attitudes of journalists – that they are, as a social layer generally ‘left’ of centre on the political spectrum (Schultz 1992; Schultz 1998⁷²; Simons 1999) – their support for an Australian republic should not come as a surprise. The news media, as social institutions, also favour a republican Australia: of the 28 editorials recorded in the database 23 (82 per cent) were pro-republican while only three (11 per cent) expressed anti-republican views. None of the editorials in the collection was pro-monarchist and only one did not openly espouse one side or the other.

An editorial in *The Australian* early in the first week of Con Con took a typically pro-republican stance in relation to the dismissal (“Clean slate best for codification”, 4 February 1998, p.12). It argued that for many Australians, their position on the republican debate depends on how they view the Whitlam government’s dismissal in 1975. The leader writer pointed out that the “so-called powers” held by Australia’s present Head of State are unwritten and that constitutional experts disagree about them:

Thus, in 1975, conventional wisdom had it that the Prime Minister could not be dismissed while he had the support of the House of Representatives. Nonetheless, the Governor-General sacked the Prime Minister after reaching a belief, which was well founded, that

⁷² Refer to Chapter 7 for a discussion of these issues. In 1992 Julianne Schultz conducted an extensive survey of Australian journalists which found that they were overwhelmingly left of centre on most social issues. The findings and the survey questions are discussed at length in her book *Reviving the Fourth Estate* (1998).

the Senate would not give the Government Supply - the money to pay its bills. His view of the applicable convention was that likelihood that a government might try to continue in dismissal and the calling of an election. Such conflicting interpretations of convention would be just about impossible to codify. (The Australian 4 February 1998, p.12)

The dismissal is certainly still a raw nerve in the body politic and contested interpretations of Kerr's actions in November 1975 underpinned press coverage of Con Con.

**'Invited' commentators:
The press constructs a position for the 'commoners'**

Being in Old Parliament House, there was more than just a sense of the past as Gough sat busily interjecting from the gallery. He didn't hang around for the dour contribution of Sir David Smith. (Lundy 1998a, p.5)

At the time of the Convention, Kate Lundy was an ALP Senator representing the ACT, she was an appointed parliamentary delegate to Con Con and lucky enough to be offered space in *The Canberra Times*, but only twice. On the other hand Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* was well served, two of its regular columnists were delegates. Appointed delegate Miranda Devine⁷³ found the time, in between attending the sessions, dinners, celebrations and caucuses, to write five columns for her paper (father Frank wrote two for *The Australian*). Mark Day was only an alternate delegate for the ARM and with more time on his hands was able to produce 10 columns on Con Con.

Leading monarchist and Liberal MP Tony Abbott used one of his nine 'columns' to accuse the media of "abandoning professional detachment" by implying everyone is now a republican (Abbott 1998a). He also linked the republic issue to

⁷³ Miranda Divine is an arch-conservative who speciality is crude hatchet-job pieces on unions, feminists and anything vaguely 'left'. In 2001 she left the *Daily Terror* for a position on the *Sydney Morning Herald's* roster of 'tame' columnists.

the general malaise infecting the public's attitude towards politics, parliament and politicians:

The republican push has become another aspect of the general crisis of legitimacy and authority. People don't trust politicians, even though they elected them; don't trust institutions, even though they have stood the test of time; and clamour for leadership, only to reject it when it comes. (Abbott 1998b, p.5)

Tony Abbott certainly represents a particular trajectory of the 'new' nationalist emotional dialectic - those who wish to turn back time. Abbott's final comment on the issue in the *Weekend Australian* (14 February 1998) argues that intelligent republicans should have supported the super-minimalist McGarvie model on cue from Howard because it was the "least-worst" option on offer at Con Con. He goes on to write that, following the Convention, the ARM now had to convince monarchists that the republican model preserves Australia's existing "system of government and honours our heritage". Otherwise, Abbott intones, the ARM model may be "portrayed as instituting two headed government in Canberra". He concludes by predicting that Australia is "sliding into a Canadian style constitutional morass" (Abbott 1998c, p.4).

The usual suspects

The other delegates invited to pontificate from the pages of the press include all the usual suspects: the ARM's resident 'funny man' Steve Vizard (twice); ACT Liberal leader Kate Carnell; author and republican footy poet Thomas Kenneally; and former independent MPs Ted Mack and Phil Cleary.

'Young' people were represented among the anointed columnists by two elected Victorian delegates Misha Schubert, a 'real' republican and freelance journalist and Sophie Panopolos, a loud-mouthed young monarchist who in November 2001 was elected to a safe Victorian Liberal seat.

The efforts of Miranda Devine are worth a brief mention because one of her early columns set the tone for how some of the more 'radical' republican figures would be cast in the media spotlight. Towards the end of the first week it was clear that Turnbull and the ARM were prepared to deal with the 'centre' rather than the 'leftwing' of the republican movement, which had (in case you'd

forgotten) won enormous support among those who voted for delegates. There was a solid bloc of republicans favouring the direct election model, but John Howard made it clear that this would not get his support and this forced the ‘mainstream’ republicans to deal with the group around Sir Richard McGarvie and his super-minimalist model.

After a stormy meeting of the republican caucus publicly disowned the ‘direct electionists’ during the first week, they became virtual pariahs in the eyes of the media and fair game for snide witticisms and down right personal abuse. Devine made a sterling contribution to this ‘feeding frenzy’ in her column on Thursday 5 February, ‘Finding the fringe benefits’ which signalled that this group was “marginal” despite being able to mount a respectable 27 member caucus (about one-third of the committed republicans). The media had its sacrificial lambs, a small, highly vocal and colourful group who could be portrayed as the bad guys. Paul Kelly chimed in suggesting that the ‘realists’ (Turnbull & Co.) would win their “clash” with the “dreamers”. Direct election delegate, the now late and lamented Professor Paddy O’Brien was patronised and belittled by Kelly’s description as “that great larrikin” (Kelly 1998b, p.13). This just goes to confirm that some columnists never stray too far from the hegemonic discourse.

The story so far...

“Journalists can only tell you what’s really going on in code.

Politicians only talk to us because both sides play by strict rules. We can’t tell you directly what they really say.” (Simons 1999, p.5)

In this passage, Margaret Simons is quoting *SMH* correspondent Margo Kingston, one of the few Press Gallery journalists that regularly gets into trouble for pushing things too far. Perhaps again here she’s said more than she judiciously should have. *Thanks Margo.*

The way Miranda Devine, Paul Kelly and other journalists covered the ‘fringe dwellers’ meant that they did not need to be taken seriously on the floor of the convention, but it was more than that – it was the appropriate ‘code’ for reporting the Con Con story. As noted in the previous chapter, pejorative interpretive epithets – such as ‘extreme’ or ‘controversial’ – which precede, or even substitute for, the description of the content of proposals, circumscribe the

parameters of debate (Tiffen 1989, p.132-133). This was the accepted wisdom of Con Con that established the dialectic of the front-page.

Despite the obvious and enduring *public support* for the direct election model, the fact that the ‘mainstream’ ‘consensus’ republicans turned their backs on the model and its supporters in their own ranks. This created an atmosphere of conflict; the press contingent was back on familiar ground⁷⁴. The ‘ratbags’ were effectively ‘out of the loop’ and, as Tiffen noted, they became peripheral to the real debate. There was an ‘us and them’ situation in which the ‘them’ could be written up as being outside the ‘limited controversy’ (Hallin 1994) of ‘republican’ versus ‘monarchist’. The ‘fringe dwellers’, almost by the act of naming them such, came from beyond the parliamentary precincts (Pilger 1992) and didn’t play by the ‘proper’ rules.

The sample discussed here is necessarily only a fraction of the millions of words written in the press about Con Con, however it is a generally reflective collection of the news, opinion and editorial coverage. Apart from the usual ‘set piece’ items – transcripts of opening addresses by the key players and the solicited contributions from delegates – the tone of the press coverage was generally favourable to the ‘mainstream’ republican cause. But this statement requires one major qualification: the press coverage was very middle of the road and itself took no risks with outrageous or ‘deviant’ opinion. Once the parameters of the story had been fixed – ‘ratbags’ v. ‘realists’ – most reporters at Con Con were able to fall back on the routine of their comfortable consensus view. The reporting could focus on ‘the way the game is played’. The dialectic of the front-page transmitted an emergent cultural and political dialectic - the public wanted change - but it was an emotional attitude that was far from secure:

*And the most frightening thing is that the language is itself prevents
you from thinking differently. The language becomes the language in*

⁷⁴ On the Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of the first week the ‘direct election’ group held a couple of press conferences at which they displayed anger and emotion at the way Turnbull had shafted them. This added to the gallery’s amourey of abuse and insults, particularly as the two leading women, Aboriginal magistrate Pat O’Shane and human rights lawyer Moira Rayner were both ‘flamboyant’.

which politics actually happens. The code becomes the only available vocabulary. (Simons 1999, p.65)

The gallery remembers November 11, 1975

They were very significant years for everybody. Also you've got to realise that some of those episodes, if they radicalised people, it wasn't necessarily radicalising them to the left of politics. I have come across a number of people who were radicalised to the right by 1975. (Farr, Pers. Comm 1997)

Simons (1999) divides the Press Gallery into three groups that are defined functionally – the ageing ‘leaders’ or ‘ex-Gods’, the 30-something to 50-something ‘hard hitters’ and the ‘young and restless’. I believe that this can be further refined on the basis of ‘generation’ into five groups and that actual or ‘learned’ memories of 1975 can help clarify these age-based distinctions.

The Ex-Gods

Well, there was in the 60s a club, it was known as The Club. The Courier Mail, the Herald and Weekly Times people and the SMH...not a regular thing but on a basic sort of story, covering a stock event...we didn't have the manpower that we have now and so you would say, 'Right, you cover that and we'll cover that and we'll share it.' It was a pool system...It was an early method of pooling probably to that extent. (Wallace Brown, Pers Com 12 February 1998)

The oldest cohort, most of who also qualify as ‘ex-Gods’ are reaching retirement age and have generally been around the Press Gallery for many years. Members of this group – the ‘old timers’ – probably worked at old Parliament House and are the ‘collective memory’ of political journalism in Australia. The next group is the baby-boomer generation, now in middle age and with a wealth of experience, some of Simons’ ‘ex-God’ cohort is in this category. Generally they were already working as journalists in 1975, but not usually in the gallery. I have called the next youngest group the ‘space-racers’ to distinguish them from the well-known ‘generation X’ and the baby-boomers. The space-racers were born between about 1955 and the late ‘60s and would have been at university or in

high school in 1975, therefore able to remember something of 1975 from experience. The space-racers would normally have 10 to 15 years' experience in journalism and have probably worked at 'head office' before joining the Press Gallery. 'Generation X' is now an accepted term for the 20-something generation now approaching their 30s. In 1975 this group would have been toddlers and the dismissal below their memory threshold, though they may have picked up some inklings from parents or older siblings as they grew up. 'Gen Xers' will usually have been in journalism for five to 10 years. The final group I have called 'Century 21', they are recent graduates on the threshold of a career in journalism and will generally be in junior positions within their bureaus.

The baby-boomer Gallery

I was in Melbourne, I was working at the Age office. I had been a journalist then for five years. I had gone into journalism straight after graduating in Arts. I don't remember precisely where I was at that moment but I'd gone out for lunch and I recall coming back into the office and David Wilson, one of my colleagues, walked up and said "Kerr's sacked Whitlam." I said "God, Wilson you never understood politics did you? You know that couldn't happen." (Tim Colebatch, Pers. Comm 12 February 1998)

Tim Colebatch is a baby-boomer in the Gallery and is still working from the *Age* office in Canberra. In the early 1970s he was the environmental reporter for many years before the round became important on the national agenda. Colebatch had wanted to be a journalist from an early age and believes he was "born" to it, though he concedes that others pick up skills at "an extraordinary rate once they get into it".

Malcolm Farr is a senior reporter in the News Limited bureau and the Chief Political Correspondent for *The Daily Telegraph*. He first joined the gallery in 1976, went overseas in 1977 and worked for News Limited in Brisbane before rejoining the Press Gallery in 1991 (Farr, Pers. Comm. 1997). Farr just over 50 (he was born in 1951) and was 'a very junior reporter' in the Melbourne bureau of *The Australian* on November 11, 1975. He recalls that in its last year of office (1975), the Whitlam government was perceived to be "quite a frightening beast

and out of control too”. He adds that the dismissal dashed the hopes of many young people who had supported Whitlam in 1972, “it seems that the political course or direction of my generation, of people my age, had suddenly had the door slammed in its face” (Farr, Pers. Comm. 1997).

Geoffrey Barker was sitting at the newsdesk in the *Age* office when John Jost phoned from Canberra ‘and said in great excitement Kerr had just sacked Whitlam’. Assistant editor Creighton Burns was “running around saying we’d better get a copy of Quick and Garran [the ‘bible’ to the Constitution]” and Barker was “thinking how on earth do we explain to people what’s gone on” (Barker, Pers. Comm. 1998). In 1975 Barker had been at *The Age* for 15 years. He started in 1960 when part way through an economics degree at Melbourne University, which he recalls he hated at the time. He later returned to study and completed a degree in philosophy.

Barker had strong feelings about the dismissal: he had some ‘serious admiration’ for Whitlam and came from a union-oriented family. As a young leader writer at the *Age* he had written approvingly of many things the ALP was trying to do in government after the ‘decline of the Menzies era’. He felt “pretty bloody appalled” and that the dismissal had been a “constitutional coup”. He adds “I probably still do”:

I would regard myself as one of the generation of people who was shocked, appalled and permanently alienated from the Liberal side of politics because of what happened in ’75. (Barker, Pers. Comm. 1998)

Interestingly, Geoffrey Barker is not a journalist who believes in objectivity “if there is such a thing”. But he’s uncomfortable with the way that the marketing of newspapers is intruding on journalistic values, which means that journalists must “sell” as well as “tell” the story. He also sees a problem in the way that younger journalists in the Press Gallery have limited historical recall:

I don’t see a lot of these young journalists seriously reading or having studied history, or having much interest in it...but, you know, every generation comes with its own limited historical analysing. (Geoffrey Barker, Pers. Comm. 1998)

The ‘space-racers’

I was about nine years old and I remember it all on television that afternoon. I have very clear memories of my mother rushing home. She was a school teacher, terribly upset by what had happened and it divided the family intensely and proceeded to do so for about 10 years. (Rashke, Pers. Comm 1998)

In 1998 Rob Rashke was working in the gallery for Channel 7 and had been a journalist for 15 years. Rashke joined *The Australian* as a cadet, straight out of school in 1983. He was then 17 years old. He grew up remembering how the dismissal was “a constant trigger to sort of appalling family arguments” between his ‘left-wing’ mother and ‘right-wing’ father. He says the family rows probably made him “a bit reactionary”, but he had no particular affection for either side of politics. Rob’s mother said Whitlam’s sacking was “a conspiracy of the Murdoch press”, but that did not stop him from accepting a job with News Limited. At the time of the interview (February 1998) Rashke had only been in the Press Gallery for a short time, but had stints with the ABC in Australia and was the national broadcaster’s first correspondent based full-time in South Africa.

Rashke’s colleague at Channel 7 is Glenn Milne, who despite his ‘space-racer’ age status is definitely one of Simons’ ‘heavy-hitters’, mainly by virtue of his time with News Limited – he still writes a regular column for *The Australian*. Milne was an Arts/Law student (and a contemporary of mine) at Sydney University in 1975 but claims he was unmoved by the dismissal:

I was still forming my political views and this was something of a mainstream political brawl that involved institutions in which, at that stage, I didn’t invest much value. So even though I was politically aware and politically involved at Sydney University on the left, I didn’t regard this necessarily as a fight. (Milne, Pers. Comm. 1998)

Glenn Milne entered journalism via the music industry going from band manager to rock and roll columnist. After stints on Melbourne suburbans and on the Gladstone (Qld) paper he went to the Brisbane *Telegraph* and arrived at the Fairfax bureau in 1985. Ten years after the dismissal, Milne remembers: “I was aware that the people who were here in ’75 had sort of become an iconography

of the place because it [had been] such a dramatic moment in covering politics”. (Milne, Pers. Comm. 1998). But for Milne the political complexion of the gallery in 1985 was more defined by where people stood in relation to the Hawke/Hayden leadership battle. Milne remembers that Whitlam was “far from rehabilitated at that stage” and that: “Hawke and [Treasurer] Keating were still distancing the Labor Party from Whitlam because of his [bad] economic management not because of the constitutional issues of 1975” (Milne, Pers. Comm. 1998). This is an interesting example of the ‘iconic moment’ of poor economic management by Whitlam being adapted to contemporary analysis.

Generation X

The first time I heard about 1975 was when I was standing in a lift. I was seven and we were going to Singapore and we were getting our injections and mum whispered ‘That’s the man that sacked the Prime Minister,’ and I said ‘Oh, so.’ It meant nothing to me, mum said ‘Oh, that’s Sir John Kerr.’ And I remember for years it played on my mind: ‘How could you possibly sack the Prime Minister?’ (Sadler, Pers. Comm. 1998)

For young journalists like Channel 7’s Rahni Sadler 1975 was something on the high school Australian history curriculum. She wasn’t quite three-years-old in November 1975 and only 11 when Bob Hawke became Prime Minister in 1983. Rahni’s high school teacher was a staunch Labor supporter and at the end of her HSC 3 Unit history course she thought “Whitlam was God and God had been dethroned”. But this didn’t translate into support for the ALP: her family voted Liberal and she remembers in 1983 thinking “Hawke was this mean awful man who didn’t know what he was doing and Fraser was for the good of everybody” (Sadler Pers. Comm. 1998).

Sadler had “always wanted to be a journalist” and eventually in 1993, after doing work experience in radio landed a job at WIN TV, the Channel 9 affiliate in regional NSW. She said she got the job when a “girl I had had lunch with for half an hour remembered me and recommended me” to someone at the station. Her break into the gallery came when she met Channel 7’s Glenn Milne in Thredbo

where they were both covering the mudslide that killed 19 people in the winter of 1997.

Passing the 'knowledge'

The God correspondents were not good teachers, nor good developers of talent. ...This is not only a fault of individuals. There is something in the culture of the profession...that acts against the education and inspiration of those who are making their way up.

(Simons 1999, p.113)

These words are among the last 200 in Margaret Simons' personal and provocative account of the Press Gallery. It is a harsh judgment, though it no doubt contains at least some truth. With a couple of exceptions the gallery is a friendly place, despite the obvious competition. Anyone who's been to an ALP national conference, or travelled on the election trail as a reporter knows that the camaraderie is real and strong. The gallery's 'characters' will always crack a joke at the right time to ease the tension, and the comradeship of the bottle and glass is hearty. It is in these less formal environments that most of the 'learning' goes on in the Press Gallery - it's very much 'on the job' education. At the same time, bureau chiefs do take younger reporters under their wing and 'nurture' the talented ones.

So how do the 'young and the restless' (Simons 1999) learn about major events in political history – the 'dismissal' for example? Some of them weren't even born in 1975, others barely walking or in primary school. It was, after all, more than a quarter of a century ago. For this group the events of November 11 and the 'Whitlam years' are known only from conversations with parents and teachers, or what they might have read in a university subject on Australian politics or history. It's not so difficult for those who were actually *there*, or old enough to be emotionally affected – one way or the other – by what happened at Yarralumla and later on the steps of Parliament House.

Malcolm Farr is quite proud of his "small, but pretty nice political library" and regularly reads Australian political writing by journalists which he finds "lively, it's more captivating because it's done with a journalist's eye to what's interesting". He's also involved in training some of the younger people sent to

the gallery by News Limited for what he jokingly describes as “the Malcolm Farr finishing school”. Farr is also quite taken with some of the younger people in the gallery who are “very smart, they’re well educated...and they’re very keen” (Farr, Pers. Comm. 1997). Though he admits that without experience “it’s difficult perhaps for younger journalists to get a picture of what’s happening”.

Geoffrey Barker says he worries about the poor educational standards apparent in some younger Press Gallery operatives:

I just think we’ve debased the quality of university education in this country in many ways, very few [newer journalists] have a clear understanding of the difference between facts and values...I said something about Stanley Melbourne Bruce to somebody the other day and the kid said “Who’s he?” (Barker, Pers. Comm. 1998)

As Chief Political Correspondent for *The Daily Telegraph* Malcolm Farr is senior in the bureau, but he says he’s also one of the oldest and so often gets asked about his memories of earlier stories:

Maybe because they’re lazy and don’t want to look it up themselves and think they can just come in here and ask me. But also, journalists are storytellers and on social occasions there are lots of stories that have the function of not only informing people, younger journalists. But also making them feel part of a group; the great fraternity-sorority of journalism. (Farr, Pers. Comm. 1997)

Geoffrey Barker is a bit of a loner and laughingly admits he might be an “old fart”, but he does observe the younger gallery members as they go about their daily rounds. He believes they “share a set of beliefs” and says the “worst” of these is that “they’re somehow superior in terms of knowledge, understanding and perception than anybody they write about” (Pers. Comm. 1998). Barker has a sense that these young reporters are “highly opinionated, but with very little reason to be that way” and he blames it on their lack of education – both in history and in writing skills. Unfortunately, when pressed for a solution Geoffrey Barker is stumped. When he was a young reporter he was able to question the real ‘Gods’ of the gallery, people like Alan Reid, but he was also some one who read a great deal. And his advice for today’s ‘young and restless’?

I suppose in some informal ways, gradually, you may, when you talk to people, pass on your selection of bits of memory and fact. I just don't know how, unless they're going to do some hard reading and thinking about it. (Barker, Pers. Comm. 1998)

For Geoffrey Barker the lasting impression he has of the impact of 1975 is how little journalists (and the rest of us) seem to know about the Constitution and the history of the debate about republicanism, which 'ebbed and flowed' through the late 18th and right through the 19th centuries up to Australia becoming a federation in 1901. This suggests that the 'Constitution' as an idea, rather than an understood document, is part of a shared emotional dialectic of nationalism, but it is not really part of the 'historicity' of popular consciousness.

Rahni Saddler had only been in the Press Gallery for six months at the time of the interview (February 1998), but she is possibly one of the lucky ones who has done some 'hard reading and thinking about it' during her high school and university years. Even with this enthusiasm and preparation it was a different world when she arrived in the gallery:

I got up there and it was the hugest world, there was so much to know, there is so much to know. There's so many things happening all the time, it's hard to keep your head across everything. And it's not just a matter of reading nine papers in the morning and constantly checking the box. It's the feel of the place, it's the rumour mill, and it's the nuances of the whole thing. (Sadler, Pers. Comm. 1998)

Sadler finds the best way to learn 'on the job' is to "just listen a hell of a lot". Asking questions helps, but she says you can't ask too many because of the need to maintain an air of "I know what's going on". She says it's necessary to become a media junkie, reading all the papers and watching as much television news or current affairs as you can handle. Networking, especially with the press secretaries, is also a useful way to pick up political knowledge but not much comes from senior gallery personnel: 'I wouldn't say a lot of advice comes down from the top. I felt it was just presumed that I would know a lot of stuff' (Sadler, Pers. Comm. 1998).

The pack, the whole pack and nothing but the pack

Even when the gallery ran as a pack, it was hard to really hate them. It was not a pack of rabid, slavering wolves, but more a pack of over-excited puppy dogs, twisting and turning, chasing each other and their own tails, all afire with the excitement of the moment, with the thrill of being allowed out on a really good run. (Simons 1999, p.102)

It's not hard to agree with Margaret's feeling that the hungry, pack mentality of the Press Gallery is over-stated. By and large the nation's political reporters are a friendly bunch. Most of them are genuinely concerned to do the best job they can within the personal, professional and institutional constraints imposed on them by responsibility, peer pressure, deadlines and the need of their employers to justify the expense of keeping them in Canberra.

After all, it's an important function – guarding the portals of the Fourth Estate – and without the gallery we wouldn't know anything of the sometimes Machiavellian machinations of the masterly Mandarins hidden away in a man-made cave on a leafy hilltop in a sleepy rural hollow hundreds of kilometres away from most of us and thousands of kilometres from many.

There is a certain elitism and mystique surrounding the Press Gallery and in the face of criticism it usually presents a united front to the rest of the nation. However, in the end each reporter and commentator does her or his best to make sense of the 'cultural information chaos' that passes for 'news' from our federal capital.

Conclusion

How do the Gallery journalists know when they've got a story right? Often they don't. In the coded language of political journalism some things can be misunderstood, misrepresented and misreported – through accident, omission, or design. They learn from their mistakes and from each other. This chapter has shown that the culture of the semi-insider nourishes them and either by osmosis or by their own efforts, at the end of the day, they write what they think is right. With limited time and the distraction of a hundred other pressing stories, the gallery sometimes simplifies complex issues, or relies on a sort of shorthand to

get a point across. Yes, they talk to each other and ‘caucus’ on stories. But is this such a bad thing? After all, this in one way that the less experienced can gain in knowledge, confidence and ability to fit the jigsaw puzzle of policy and politics together. What this represents is no more than a standard cultural practice that helps to confirm the emotional attitudes of a Gallery insider. Without this process of socialisation the newer reporters coming through would not have any reference points to help interpret what is going on around them.

In relation to the unresolved issues thrown up by Whitlam, Fraser and Kerr on a sunny spring morning in November 1975, this chapter has suggested that the journalists either know from experience or by received knowledge, from many sources, that they’re continually writing the ‘first draft of history’. Therefore, they are forced to operate with one eye on the future, one eye on the past and a passion for storytelling. This chapter has shown that the events of 1975 and their articulation into a fluid dialectic of nationalism is perhaps the most dramatic and important element in the fabric of shared consciousness that the Press Gallery displays. Certainly in terms of the 1998 republican convention it was the key story that flavoured the dialectic of the front-page.

This chapter and chapter 5 have dealt with Derek Parker’s allegation of a pack mentality operating in the Press Gallery and I have argued that this is not the result of a shared ideological passion for the Labor Party, but the product of circumstance - the physical separation of the Gallery correspondents from head office, the sharing of resources due to the constraints of the job and an emotional dialectic that privileges Gallery members as semi-insiders. It is not a conspiracy, but a result of the process itself, the social relations of production that constitute the Gallery.

The evidence presented in this chapter also confirms my claim that the hegemonic emotional dialectic that informs political journalism in Australia today is the national interest and questions around what I have described as an emerging ideology - ‘new’ nationalism as exemplified by the republic debate of the late 1990s. It is clear from the analysis in this chapter that many, if not most, Press Gallery journalists are grey collar, though perhaps occupying some of the more elevated contradictory class locations as described by Callinicos (1989b). Some, more senior, correspondents work closely to the accepted norms of the

hegemonic dialectic, while others are prepared to challenge conventional wisdom.

Margaret Simons completes her journey to the “second floor on the Senate side” of Parliament House with an observation that political journalism is in the doldrums. She’s not alone in that pessimism, some of the gallery insiders she spoke to agree with her and so do many outsiders who seem to delight in aiming for the messenger whenever something they read in the paper, hear on the radio or see on television, displeases them. Simons ends her book with a hope for change:

If political reporting is to be revived, it will be partly because of a victory over the barren legacy of today’s journalistic culture (Simons 1999, p.113)

This is a big ask and demands no less than a ‘cultural revolution’ in journalism. If the new hands can learn from the old and resist the temptation to join the game, rather than critique from the sidelines, it might happen. Then again it might not – as no less a gallery ‘God’ than Michelle Grattan has recently written: the Australian media is currently in the midst of a “revolution” of sorts. Yet you may not realise it because “what has been happening is, by general agreement, almost some sort of secret, so minimal is the debate in media circles, and especially among rank and file journalists” (Grattan 1998, p.1). It is a revolution mounted by the economic rationalists and it’s not necessarily in the interests of good journalism.

Perhaps journalism educators in universities can make a difference. As a group they try, sometimes in vain, to encourage our students to read more, to study history and politics and to take an interest in the world around them. Journalism educators also try to equip their students with the mental agility; ethics and courage to stand up for themselves and defy the ‘bean counters’. Most of us have ‘been there, done that’ and know from our own experiences of journalism that those who refuse to learn from history are doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past. Then again, it is often by getting it wrong the first time, that we get it right the next time we try.

Chapter 7

Profitability and Public Interest: Can we revive the Fourth Estate?

“The truth, the whole truth, and anything but the truth,” said Townsend, smiling. “Just as long as it sells papers.” (Archer)

In Jeffrey Archer’s novel, *The Fourth Estate*, one media baron, Townsend has an Australian accent and the other media baron, Armstrong, commits suicide by jumping, naked, from his luxury cruising yacht. Despite its title, *The Fourth Estate* is about money, not journalism. There’s no pretence that journalism and the media are about the ideals and morals of public interest. The protagonists are ruthless, each constantly trying to overcome the other and destroying anyone who gets in their way.

On the other hand, in her 1998 book, *Reviving the Fourth Estate*, journalist, media executive and university lecturer, Julianne Schultz tries to straddle to contradiction between profitability and public interest - the contradictory dialectic of the front-page. The more cynically-minded might suggest, a little unkindly perhaps, that Julianne Schultz is wasting her time attempting to breathe new life into an institution that is in its last gasp.

This chapter argues that, despite its stark and unresolvable contradictions, the emotional dialectic of the ‘Fourth Estate’ had become the hegemonic paradigm for journalism by the concluding years of the 20th Century. Its historical roots are, as we have seen, in the bourgeois revolutions of the 17th and 18th Centuries. That it has survived for so long is ample testament to its strength. As the 21st Century looms before us there are those who question its continuing relevance.

This chapter covers several aspects of this debate and examines how the emotional attitudes of newswriters might be shifting in response to the technological and social forces that have brought us what I have called 'late modernity' and which others (Hartley 1996) prefer to call postmodernism.

In dire need of resuscitation?

There is now a widespread, and reasonable, doubt that the contemporary news media can any longer adequately fulfil the historic role the press created for itself...as an institution of political life designed to act on behalf of the people...[it has become] a source of real and significant power and influence, an industry prepared to exercise and pursue self-interested commercial, political and cultural agendas. (Schultz 1998, p.1)

By her own admission, Julianne Schultz believes that attempting to revive the Fourth Estate is a thankless, even hopeless, task given the commercial pressures that dominate any democratic ideals journalists, reporters and editors might harbour about their work.

This chapter examines the contradiction between the idealistic view of journalism as the Fourth Estate and the competing view that the media is just another business. The focus for this study is the lengthy, yet ultimately disappointing, review of the journalist's Code of Ethics in the late 1990s. After much hot air and pious opinion, the Code was eventually lengthened from 10 Clauses to 12, but many commentators believe that the expanded Code is a weaker instrument than its predecessor was. This chapter supports that view and additionally argues that the review failed to address the central contradiction between profitability and public interest. In fact, I argue that this breach cannot be repaired. The philosophical premise on which change was to be based - that the contradiction between profitability and public interest could be somehow ignored, or overcome - was fundamentally flawed and thus doomed. Instead I argue for a new dialectic - one that recognises the antagonistic class divisions of capitalism.

News: A market place of ideas?

Australian newspapers have been undergoing a revolution. And yet

it's as though what has been happening is, by general agreement, almost some sort of secret, so minimal is the debate in media circles, and especially among rank and file journalists.

In this revolution, what I will term "commercialisation" has come into the ascendant as a core value. (Grattan 1998, p.1)

The mass media has always been 'commercial' and advertising revenues its lifeblood (Windschuttle 1988, p.3). The point Michelle Grattan is making is about the "convergence" of editorial and commercial aspects of the media so that what used to be journalistic decisions based on news values, are now management decisions, based on the needs of the marketing department.

There's general consensus among media sociologists that journalism is a commodity when it lands on the news stand– in the same way that the finished car is a commodity when it hits the showroom – but there's little clarity about what this actually means. It's obvious to most commentators that it implies "a number of market–led restraints" (McNair 1998, p.109), but to others it means the unfettered circulation of ideas: "we are speaking of a market, offering choice" (Horne 1994, p.9). But often this 'choice' is very limited – a choice between one type of sensationalism and another:

Competition and the pressure to find stories sensational enough [to sell newspapers] encourage invention, exaggeration and the invasion of privacy. (Snoddy 1992, p.142)

The nature of journalists' work is changing in response to new technologies and mass media marketing strategies (Underwood 1983; Schultz 1994; Berkowitz 1997; Grattan 1998). However, the dominant theoretical paradigm for describing journalism and journalists is still the free market economy, despite the fact that most commentators and theorists are forced to concede it does not operate that way in the real world:

The informative function [of journalism] is linked to the media's traditional watchdog role. It is mirrored in the journalist's unwritten contract with the public: 'We exist to serve your interests'. In doing so, the media serve their own commercial interests. If a newspaper succeeds in its core role of serving readers it will [in theory] attract

more readers. In turn, this will provide more potential customers for advertisers. This idyllic state of cause and effect should result in a perpetual-motion merry-go-round: greater profits, bigger newsroom budgets, better public service, more readers and advertising, and greater profits. But it does not always – or very often – happen that way. (Conley 1997, p.39)

In the small '1' liberal framework favoured by most media theorists and accepted by most journalists, this contradiction cannot easily be resolved and leads to research propositions that are circular and end in an ideological impasse:

“If news is a commodity only, the production of news narratives should follow market logic...So if a [television] station acts rationally, a business model would predict largely passive discovery [of news events to cover], or at least as passive as competing stations permit.” (McManus 1997, p.287)

On the other hand:

If news has a public service component in addition to being a product sold for profit, journalistic norms should influence the business rationale described above. A journalistic model would predict largely active discovery or at least as active discovery process as the station could afford (McManus 1997, p.287)

The McManus study concludes inconclusively, the findings of such empirical surveys being limited by both the lack of theoretical clarity and by their methodologies, leading to soft statements from the researcher that do not advance the debate:

Taken as a whole, these results indicate that when market logic and journalism logic conflicted at the first stage of news production, market logic won most of the time...it appears that local television news could afford to do considerably better. (McManus 1997, p.297)

The illogical market

The unanswered question is *why*? Why doesn't market logic dictate more active newsgathering methods? Surely this would lead to a better product, more profits,

more job satisfaction, etc. Why should the news media's relationship to the 'free' market result in loss of public service, loss of career paths for reporters, less information in the public interest and a never-ending drive for profits? It is a central concern of this thesis that this crucial question cannot be answered within the framework of market economics. The so-called 'free market' is an ideological construct designed to disguise the rule of Capital, rather than a scientific explanation of cause and effect.

This chapter explains the contradiction (more profits + less accountability to the public) through applying a materialist analysis to the news production process, rather than seeking explanations in the self-perpetuating and circular logic of the marketplace as exemplified by Donald Horne:

I can't imagine any theory of citizenship in a liberal-democratic society that would hold together for five seconds without an emphasis somewhere stressing the need for what might be described in idealistic terms as 'a free market in ideas', meaning something more than simply freedom from government censorship. (Horne 1994, p.69)

At the same time, this thesis demonstrates, via the category of grey collar journalist, that social control in the newsroom is contested and that it is the tension between Capital and labour (both inside and outside the newsroom) that creates the type of news that newsrooms generate.

The central theme throughout this thesis is to examine the question of who has social control over the news production process that drives both the ways in which journalists work and the content and style of their reporting output. This argument turns the marketplace of ideas notion of 'giving consumers what they want' on its head. Consumers get what those with the power and control over the production of news decide is worth publishing, whether for economic or political/ideological reasons. In a broad sense the content of the news commodity - its use-value in the market place of ideas - is that it articulates a series of hegemonic (but contested) emotional attitudes and helps to establish the common parameters of the dominant ideology.

Controlling the market for news: Social control in the newsroom

Every newspaper has [an editorial] policy, admitted or not. One paper's policy may be pro-Republican, cool to labor, antagonistic to the school board, etc. The principal areas of policy are politics, business and labor; much of it stems from consideration of class.
(Breed 1997, p.108, emphasis added)

Left-wing British journalist and author, John Pilger suggests in his introduction to *Distant Voices* (1992, p.9) that “behind [this] supermarket facade” of the media lurk institutional and psychological controls, “reminiscent of those in the old Soviet Union”. As Warren Breed (1997) discovered in his 1955 study and as others have confirmed since, journalists exercise little or no control over the production process. As *workers*, journalists, like those who labour on the car plant assembly line, are subject to the “central antagonism defining class relations in capitalist society” (Callinicos 1989, p.7).

Social control...over you?

In a classic definition of the problem, Warren Breed (1997) identified the process of *social control* through which managers and editors exercise power over newsroom operations. The daily operational exercise of this control affects the news agenda in a way that structures editorial policy so that it, “usually protects property and class interests, and thus the strata and groups holding these interests are better able to retain them” (Breed 1997, p.117).

A recent American study that brings the work of Breed into a contemporary setting is nicely titled *When MBAs rule the newsroom* (Underwood 1993). This book eloquently describes how news agendas and news values are suffering under the impact of managerial pressure. In the interests of Capital, newspaper executives institute programs designed to cut costs and increase the profitability of the multinational corporations that own and control most U.S. (and Australian) media outlets. Underwood notes how newspapers and television in the United States are now completely enmeshed in corporate capitalism (1993, p.15). Schultz and her co-authors (1994) demonstrate similar patterns are emerging in the Australian media. Former Fairfax editor, David Bowman, makes the argument well:

The commonest characteristic of newspaper proprietors everywhere has always been their belief in the divine right of proprietors. In Australia the belief is dying hard. And perhaps it is only the optimist who believes it is dying at all. (Bowman 1988, p.65)

A short decade later the situation is, if this is possible, worse than Bowman might have realised in the late 1980s. Australia's 'richest man' Kerry Francis Bullmore Packer has made no secret of his desire to own and control the Fairfax presses, but his ambition was thwarted by Australia's clumsy cross-media ownership laws. In 2001 Packer sold off his 15 per cent share in Fairfax, but other giant corporations are lurking at the gate, ready to buy in when the price is right (Simper 2001, pp.6–7)⁷⁵.

The Fourth Estate: An agency of the State?

The main reason - perhaps to many the sole reason why the Press has a social responsibility over and beyond that of other commercial organisations is that it proclaims social responsibility as one of its aims. The Press actually sets out to market social responsibility.
(Walsh 1970, p.42)

The "social responsibility" of the press grew out of its role in the modern bourgeois revolutions - to defend and proclaim the interests of an emerging and powerful new ruling class against its enemies 'above' and 'below'. It is precisely its aim the 'market' this responsibility that leads the concept of the Fourth Estate into hot water. The notion of a 'Fourth Estate', sitting alongside the parliaments, executives and courts that rule liberal democratic capitalism, is as old as modern journalism. It was born amid the battles for a free press that occurred in the 18th ad 19th centuries. It has a noble heritage, related by birth to the American war of independence and the French revolution. However, like many young firebrands,

⁷⁵ At the time of writing up this thesis (January 2002) there is more debate about media ownership rules in Australia. Unfortunately I cannot comment here due to time and space considerations. In short, the Howard government is again examining ways and means of keeping the Murdoch and Packer families happy.

it has grown fat and comfortable in middle age and the Fourth Estate today rarely strikes fear into the hearts of tyrants anywhere. In fact, as Schultz herself concedes, the tyrants have tamed the idealism of the media through dint of controlling the purse strings.

The solution, according to Schultz, is for reporters and editors to rise up, *carpe diem*, and reinvigorate the Fourth Estate. Her 1992 survey of Australian journalists as part of the worldwide Media and Democracy Project⁷⁶ shows that most would like to see more investigative reporting and that the majority of newswriters are slightly left of centre in terms of personal political bias. Most respondents blamed their organisation's leadership for a failure to pursue investigative journalism. From the results Schultz suggests that commercial considerations and the interests of media owners are the biggest obstacles to disclosure of unpleasant facts about the rich and powerful (1998, p.53).

The first few chapters of *Reviving the Fourth Estate* (Schultz 1998) are concerned with an historical overview of the Fourth Estate and a discussion of how it has been defined over the years. But here Schultz seems a little confused herself: She writes on page 48: "...its meaning has changed over time", but further down, "it has changed relatively little over two centuries". Which is it? Either the meaning of the Fourth Estate has changed, or it hasn't. There can be little argument that the concept, *in practice*, has shifted over time, even if the ideal itself has remained relatively static. In terms of this thesis these changes can be theorised as a response to the dialectics of fluid and interacting contradictory ideologies. Sophisticated techniques of information management have certainly eroded the ideals of the Fourth Estate, at least in their application. This is increasingly obvious, even to the layperson, in the overwhelming amount of 'news' that is sourced directly from media releases (some estimates suggest as much as 90 per cent) and in the 'dumbing down' of news values as 'infotainment'.

⁷⁶ The questions and results are published as an Appendix to Schultz' 1998 book, *Reviving the Fourth Estate: Democracy, Accountability and the Media*.

I agree with Schultz that we need to do something about this, I'm just not sure that *reviving* the Fourth Estate is the way to go. If the idea retains any relevance – for example, the media as 'watchdog' – it is that the watching role is performed on behalf of the system as a whole. The *myth* of the Fourth Estate is an effective ideology which masks the symbiotic relationship between the media and the state: "the media's real agenda – commercial success and maintenance of the status quo – is revealed" (p.55). Professionalism can blind reporters to the assumptions that underpin their daily practise and to their own objective situation as 'churners' of the dominant ideology. The ideological spectacles, worn so comfortably by some journalists and with irritation by others in the media, tend to blur the vision and take the class antagonisms of capitalism out of focus. I have demonstrated in previous chapters that this class-blindness is a result of the contradictory class locations that journalists occupy within the middle classes and the actual conditions under which they work. Poulantzas notes that this process, "gives rise to specifically corporatist forms of trade-union struggle; this competitive isolation is the basis of a complex ideological process that takes the form of petty-bourgeois individualism" (1975, p.291). This ideology – expressed in the ideals of the 'Fourth Estate' – can only be challenged under conditions of extreme crisis: events (so far unforeseen) that would push grey collar journalists closer to the ranks of the proletariat, where their economic condition would appear to place them in objective circumstances.

However, given the bounds of what's immediately achievable and journalists' desire to maintain a weather eye on possible "misdeeds, questionable practices, inconsistencies and dishonesty by the powerful" (Schultz 1998, p.55), it's important to ask 'What can be done?' In the later chapters Schultz reviews the Australian experience through the 1980s, a decade of "heady optimism" (p.230) during which many newswriters felt able to reclaim the ideals of the Fourth Estate; notably the reporting of journalists like Chris Masters and the sorely missed *National Times*. Schultz unhappily concludes that by the early '90s a backlash against the "journalism of disclosure" was building. Newspapers came under the hammer of cost-cutting and ratings-driven television current affairs returned to the easy targets – consumer rip-offs, barely disguised jingoism,

crime, law and order – “the century-old standbys of popular journalism” (Schultz 1998, p.230).

Will the audience do it for us?

Despite the seemingly unstoppable rise of “junk journalism” (which is remarkably similar to Brian McNair’s ‘Newszak’ in concept) Schultz concludes that the ideals of the Fourth Estate have proved “remarkably resilient” (1998, p.231). She argues that responsibility for maintaining the Fourth Estate has passed “from the news media, as a corporate institution, to the journalists, editors and producers, who produce the content of the news media” (Schultz 1998, p.232). Unfortunately, the solution offered by Schultz seems tokenistic and is only introduced in the very last paragraph of the book:

If journalists were able to build more meaningful, reflective alliances with their audiences, they could become a more significant democratic force. Schultz 1998, p.238)

This is a fine sentiment, but the vital ‘how’ question has not been addressed in this text and given the pessimistic assessment Schultz offers in the historical accounting of the rest of the book, it seems a little simplistic. Media proprietors and their acolytes have argued for years that they only give readers and viewers what they want. If this basic (and false) assumption is not challenged, how can we go beyond it?

Change the Code

Any code that is workable in this situation has to have appeal; it has to be aspirational; it has to provide signposts for the journalist of good will wanting to do the right in difficult circumstances. (Brennan 1997, p.vi)

Father Frank Brennan, of the Catholic Church media office, chaired the long review into the MEAA Code of Ethics, which reported in 1997 and recommended wholesale changes. His hope was that the new code would make the newsroom “no place for cowboys” and would “deserve a place on the wall” (Brennan 1997, pp.v-vii). He also made plea for better education of newswriters and for a change in newsroom culture. It seems to me we’re still waiting.

The 1998 changes to the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) Code of Ethics are discussed in the context of a broader debate about media ethics and the history of the journalist's code. This chapter argues that the new Code of Ethics does not resolve the basic *ideological* conflict between news as information, that the public has a 'right to know' and news as a commercial product of the information/entertainment industry. I have reviewed the history of the Code of Ethics and examined the clauses of the 1944 and 1984 journalists' codes to put the revised version into an historical context. The chapter concludes that even good Codes of Ethics may be difficult to implement when the dominant culture in the newsroom is based on commercial relations of production. I have suggested that to change newsroom culture will require more than mild amendments to the Code of Ethics. The aim is to encourage further debate among media professionals and journalism educators about the history and the social relations of news production. Only by radically overhauling the very foundations of the media as a commodity enterprise can the public interest achieve ascendancy over the profit motive.

The new 1998 Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) Code of Ethics for journalists appears, on face value, to be an improvement on earlier versions. For example, there are now explicit references to plagiarism and chequebook journalism and the clauses dealing with source confidentiality have been rewritten. The 1944 code had eight points, the 1984 revision took this to ten and added a Preamble, the 1995 proposed code shot up to 20 points, with a revised Preamble and a short Postscript. The version finally settled on by the union's governing Conference was 12 points, the preamble and the postscript.

This chapter is more concerned with the 'big picture' of profitability and public interest, rather than the specific Clause changes in the Code of Ethics. However, attention is paid to some important changes, particularly regarding 'disclosure' of sources and the tension between 'news' and 'entertainment' articulated in the new Preamble (MEAA, 1995a). However, it is worth noting some of the important concrete recommendations of the review committee, even though, in the final version not all of them were adopted. Clause 2 introduces a 'right of reply' for people subject to damaging reports. Clauses 4 and 5 make a direct reference to new technologies available to the media, from hidden cameras to

digitally enhanced images. Clause 6 quite bluntly states: “Plagiarism is cheating. Always attribute fairly” (MEAA, 1995a). Clause 8 calls for full disclosure of cheque book journalism. Clauses 13 and 14 refine the arguments about privacy and improve the guidelines on grief intrusion, making the informed consent of the interviewee the central test.

Of special interest are Clauses 16 and 17 which refer to endangering people “without informed consent” and dealing with stories about “the welfare of children” (MEAA, 1995a). These clauses appear to have been motivated, in part, by the controversial coverage of a siege in a farmhouse near Cangai, NSW in March 1993 (Hirst, 1994).

In the 1990s there was a reaction against the 'greed is good' ethos of the 1980s and ethics became an 'issue' beyond the behaviour of the media (Smith, 1992, p.27). Over the last decade of the 20th Century there was a constant discussion of media ethics around particular events, such as the March 1993 Cangai 'siege' (Turner, 1994b); the Deborah Cornwall 'contempt of ICAC' case (Slee, 1993); *Who Weekly's* conviction for contempt over the publication of a picture of accused murderer, Ivan Milat (Hirst, 1994); and trial by media (Quinn, 1991).

In May 1996 important questions were raised about the media's coverage of a massacre of 35 people at Port Arthur, Tasmania. Several media organisations faced possible contempt charges for identifying the accused, Martin Bryant; journalists were alleged to have stolen photographs and pretended to be relatives of victims. One newspaper admitted tampering with a photograph of Bryant, but denied it was done to 'highlight' his alleged 'madness'.

A number of media organisations have introduced Codes of Practice occasionally in response to new technology, such digital editing of photographs (PANPA *Bulletin*, October 1995). At Rural Press and the Herald & Weekly Times the management introduced company-wide Codes of Practice that state each employee's duty to serve clients, whether readers, or advertisers (PANPA *Bulletin*, December 1993; July 1994). At the Fairfax papers in Sydney and Melbourne, a 'charter of editorial independence' was won through strong industrial action (Wilson, 1992).

The media's self-reflexivity

We have shareholders. Equally I'm totally aware of my responsibility and the responsibility of the editors, to present a viewpoint that isn't beholden to any commercial point of view. So balancing that is something that I think this company has shown in the past to find vitally important, but equally to find that we do that very well.

(Hartigan in O'Regan 2001c, p.7)

This is a rare public comment from a man at the heart of the News Limited empire. John Hartigan is a former journalist and editor who, at the time of this interview on Radio National's *Media Report*, was the CEO of News Ltd. In a wide-ranging discussion, Hartigan was prepared to comment on the internal working of Murdoch's papers, something that would not have happened a generation ago. In a sense we owe a debt of gratitude to Stuart Littlemore whose pioneering Media Watch has spawned a veritable industry of media-watching journalists.

A scan of news columns reveals an almost continuous commentary about media ethics and a number of reform proposals have been put forward. Journalists, academics, media institutions and governments are taking an active interest in the performance of news and current affairs providers. This reflexivity is a fairly new and important development of the emotional dialectic of journalism and is an indication that some of the long-standing shibboleths, such as 'objectivity' are beginning to crumble under the pressure of new social relations of production.

The Senate steps in

In October 1994 the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs published a report of its investigations into the rights and obligations of the media (*Off the Record, Shield Laws for Journalists' Confidential Sources*). Recommendation 8 of the report says in part:

That clause 3 of the Code of Ethics [1984 version] be amended by the MEAA to remove the absolute character of the obligation it imposes on journalists to maintain confidentiality so that they can, with a clear conscience, comply with a court order made in the appropriate case to identify a source. (Off the Record, p.xxv)

The report's conclusion indicates that the committee was cognisant of the MEAA review process and made its expectation clear:

Once the media has adopted a new Code of Ethics, and an effective disciplinary mechanism for enforcing it, it would be appropriate to enact the legislative reform of the kind recommended by the Committee. (Off the Record, p.xxi)

The Senate Standing Committee's linkage of confidentiality privileges to better accountability and more responsibility from journalists also finds an echo in the Preamble to the revised MEAA code, "Accountability engenders trust" (MEAA, 1995a). The philosophical parallels between the Committee's report and the wording of the revised Code of Ethics are interesting. Both talk of the media's role in animating "our democratic system" (*Off the Record*, p.xvii) and giving "practical form to freedom of expression" (MEAA, 1995a).

It is quite clear that the Standing Committee wanted to legislate away any implied right of journalists to protect their sources from identification in legal proceedings, but first the MEAA code had to be changed. The MEAA review recommended amending this provision in the code (3/1984 to 19/1995). Given that the Senate Committee has clearly signalled the possibility of legislation to entrench the court's right to insist on disclosure it remains to be seen whether members of the Alliance will continue to resist attempts to make disclosure more a *legal* rather than an *ethical* issue. So far journalists have shown little enthusiasm for legal intervention into their work and are already subject to (in their view) onerous defamation and contempt of court laws. As former editor of *The Australian*, Adrian Deamer pointed out, there is no guaranteed freedom of speech in Australia, it is very much at the mercy of the courts and their political masters (PANPA, August 1994, p.23). A referendum to insert such a clause into the Constitution has been a project of former Press Council chairman, David Flint for some time (PANPA, June 1992, p.6); but it is still not on the mainstream political agenda. It is fair to suggest that this background provided much of the impetus for the revised, proposed Code of Ethics released for public discussion in September 1995.

The social context for a debate about media ethics

The increasing internationalisation of the media - foreshadowed by Canadian communications pundit Marshall McLuhan in his phrase 'the global village - may have contributed to a more critical approach to the media's functions. Certainly the new nations that emerged as the old empires crumbled were vociferous in their calls for new ways to describe the media's role and to guide journalistic practice. At the same time, the development of communications technologies brought war and civil protest into people's living rooms in real time, which raised new ethical problems. (Hurst & White 1994, p.2)

The social context for the review of the MEAA Code of Ethics was a wide-held perception that the world was changing rapidly and that the old Code (barely a decade old in 1994) could no longer sustain newswriters confronting previously un-imagined scenarios. John Hurst and Sally White are suggesting here that the 'information revolution' had something to do with why media ethics could not maintain the pace of change. Certainly that is an issue, but it's not the only one. As I have suggested throughout this thesis, it is not the technology itself that causes rapid shifts in the ways that media is produced and consumed, but the changing social relations, particularly inside the newsroom.

Plenty has been written about individual aspects of the Code of Ethics, such as death knocks (Apps, 1986; Geraghty, 1986; Powell, 1990), or chequebook journalism (Avieson, 1992). I feel it is preferable to tackle the problems at a level, which attempts to place ethics in a dynamic social context. Journalism does not exist in an ideological vacuum and at the heart of the dilemma over media ethics is the notion of a 'free market' in ideas (Horne 1994). Keith Windschuttle (*The Media*, 1988), and many others have outlined an approach to understanding the broadcasting and newspaper industries that can be characterised as the political economy of the media. Their approach emphasises the importance of the relationship between *media as capital* and its attendant *relations of production* and news/entertainment as *ideology*.

The contradictions that won't go away

Following the general plan of this thesis, the present chapter adopts this approach to argue that despite the changes to the MEAA Code of Ethics it still does not resolve the fundamental contradiction in journalism: the tension between the media as 'big business' and media as 'social critic' (Schultz, 1994). This chapter looks at the historical evidence of the three versions of the code and the specific clauses, which attempt to deal with this problem. It is recognised in the new Preamble to the Code of Ethics that journalists "search, disclose, record, question, entertain, suggest and remember". It appears to be an admission, by those who drafted the revised code, that 'infotainment' and 'tabloid' journalism is a fact of life. At the heart of the problem is a newsroom culture based on relations of production that promote news as a commodity; profit over virtue.

Former *Sydney Morning Herald* editor David Bowman adopts both a philosophical and practical approach to addressing the dilemmas inherent in any discussion of ethics (1983, p.37). He gives a point-by-point critique of the 1944 A.J.A. Code of Ethics; including its failure to deal with increasing public concerns about privacy or cheque book journalism and notes that ethics, like morals, depends on a person's social position and philosophical-political viewpoint (Bowman, 1983, p.36). He suggests that the ethics of journalists are framed by the social relations of the society in which they operate; "they have no choice but to abide, by and large, by ethics accepted by the public" (Bowman 1983, p.37). In passing, Bowman notes that the rigours of commercial competition can have a bearing on ethical (or, *unethical*) behaviour by journalists, especially in the (then) fierce afternoon tabloid market (1983, p.40).

Apps suggests that interest in media ethics began to increase in the 1980s due to both the "trickle down" effect of events in the United States and the development of tertiary journalism courses, in which ethics are taught as a discrete subject (1990, p.69). A major problem with ethics *codes*, according to Apps, is the relativity of truth, within "varying religious, cultural, political and ideological frames of reference that render the truth complex, confused and even contradictory" (1990, p.70). A code is fairly rigid and prescriptive and cannot possibly deal with all situations in all contexts. Apps is also aware of the central contradiction between the commodity form of 'news' and its social aspects. He

notes that there are "practical examples every day" of how news values are subverted by the economics of the newspaper business. This is a situation in which journalistic ethics become the ideological supports for the value system of capitalism and the "sacred cow of journalistic objectivity" becomes the fundamental acceptance of the dominant (free market) ideology (1990, p.73). Apps goes on to recommend the work of Raymond Williams and Nicholas Garnham on the political economy of the media, as a fresh perspective on the processes and understanding of media ethics. What this perspective offers in the terms of media ethics is a framework for describing the roles of individual and structure, based on criteria of economics, class and power (Apps, 1990, p.78). As I have noted in previous chapters these elements are what constitute the grounding of the emotional attitudes of newswriters and 'ethics' is the contemporary cultural form of the dialectic that powers these attitudes.

Since the mid 1980s some attempts have been made to apply the beginnings of a political economy approach to the Australian media (Windschuttle, 1988; Wilson, 1989; Schultz, 1994), but a discussion of ethics is usually confined to one chapter, or a few pages. It is significant, and perhaps embarrassing to Australian journalism, that the first book dedicated to ethics and the media in Australia did not appear until 50 years after the original Code of Ethics was adopted by the A.J.A. John Hurst and Sally White in *Ethics and the Australian News Media* treat ethical issues, "by identifying the values and principles...and examining specific cases" (1994, p.xi). Throughout the book the authors acknowledge that commercial, competitive pressures impinge on ethical discussion and decision-making. This contradiction is expressed generally in the following terms:

...the legitimate defence of the public right to know is, to its detriment, sometimes called upon to justify those media actions dictated solely by competitive pressures. The quest for healthy circulation figures breeds a powerful desire to scoop the opposition or to publish a story with sensational impact that titillates readers.
(Hurst & White 1994, p.15)

This theme is considered in a chapter entitled, 'The pressure of business' where the authors suggest that both journalists and editors are confronted with difficult

choices, "whenever the business face of the news media confronts its indivisible twin, the publicly accountable social institution" (Hurst & White 1994, p.251). American critic Daniel Hallin expresses the problem as both an economic and ideological contradiction that is journalism's "ambivalent identity" (1994, p.1). It is what I have called the contradictory emotional dialectic of newswork. I agree with Hallin's formulation that this is a struggle against the internal and external limits of the "professionalization" of journalism that threatens to upset the balance between "the public-interest culture of journalism and the culture of commodity-production" (Hallin 1994, p.4).

The 'curse' of objectivity

Some people will say that words like scum and rotten are wrong for Objective Journalism - which is true, but they miss the point. It was the built-in blind spots of the Objective rules and dogma that allowed Nixon to slither into the White House in the first place... You had to get Subjective to see Nixon clearly, and the shock of recognition was often painful. (Thompson 1995, n.p.)

Media institutions attempt to contain the contradiction between public interest and profit within the "sphere of legitimate controversy" sanctioned by liberal-democratic elites, "the region where [the ideology of] objective journalism reigns supreme: here neutrality and balance are the prime journalistic virtues" (Hallin 1994, p.54). At the same time the news media play a containing role, "excluding from the public agenda those who violate or challenge consensus values, and uphold the consensus distinction between legitimate and illegitimate political activity" (Hallin 1994, p.54). This is in fact the central and recurring dilemma that confronts journalists in all media organisations. It is the problem that the framers of the A.J.A. Code of Ethics first confronted in 1944 and it clearly troubled the code's reformers in both 1983-84 and 1994-95.

A brief history of the Code of Ethics

As a seal of professional status, a code of ethics was second only to education in the pantheon of the AJA (Lloyd 1985, p.227)

According to Clem Lloyd's history of the early years of the journalists' union, the impetus for a Code of Ethics was provided by an overseas example - the

American Society of Newspaper Editors formulated the first code in 1923 (Lloyd 1985, p.227). This was quickly followed by another proprietors' forum, the NSW Country Press Association in 1927 and then in 1930 the eminent war correspondent and historian C. E. W. Bean contacted the NSW Institute of Journalists suggesting it could improve the status of journalists by "enforcing a code of honour" (Lloyd 1985, p.227). Thus, we can see that the original pressures for the union to adopt a code were an attempt to bolster its claims for newswork as a profession. It was not until the English and South African journalists' unions did ratify codes that serious discussion began in Australia in the late 1930s. The AJA code was finally drafted in 1942 and ratified in 1944 (Lloyd 1985, p.228).

Apart from a single short chapter in Clem Lloyd's book, *Profession: Journalist* (1985), there is very little written about the history of the A.J.A. (now MEAA) Code of Ethics. In Keith Windschuttle's landmark work *The Media*, discussion of the A.J.A. code is confined to the last three pages (1988, p.413-416). Geoff Sparrow's official history of the A.J.A., *Crusade for Journalism* (1960), is an inspiring account of the early days of the union, but it does not fill out the details of discussions in the District Committees prior to moves towards a federal Code of Ethics in 1943-44. Sparrow's chapter on the code's early days is more concerned with legal challenges to its validity, rather than the philosophy behind its inception.

However, Sparrow does provide some interesting pointers that could be more fully explored in a more detailed study. The infant A.J.A.'s constant and costly battles to secure Award conditions, training and job security perhaps precluded a more concentrated effort on defining ethical practices for journalists. The founding objectives of the A.J.A. do not explicitly mention ethics, though they are arguably an early indication of the later aims of the Association (Sparrow, 1960, p.82). Another clue is provided by the internal debate about whether the Victorian journalist's association should align itself with Trades Hall or maintain an objective and professional distance from the union movement (Sparrow, 1960, p.31). The keystone of the A.J.A.'s first 20 years was the consolidation of the grading system at metropolitan and regional newspapers. While employers maintained the right of exemptions for senior editorial staff, by 1929 the

Association claimed that 95 percent of working journalists were members (Sparrow 1960, p.111). The depression years affected journalists as much as any other group and wage levels did not return to the 1929 highs until 1942 (Sparrow, 1960, p.114). While economic issues dominated early discussions, no doubt members of the A.J.A. Districts took an interest in the development of the Code of Ethics and were happy to support its introduction towards the end of World War 2.

After almost 15 years of discussion and apparent prevarication between the Federal Executive and the District Committees (Lloyd 1985, p.228), the original Code of Ethics was endorsed by the Australian Journalists' Association in 1944. Melbourne King's Counsel, J.V. Barry was mainly responsible for drafting the code. He was also a member of the Victorian District Committee and the ethics committee of the Victorian branch (Sparrow 1960, p.132). According to Sparrow's history, the Association drew up the Code of Ethics "to give journalists a sense of support" and "a prescription for proper conduct in carrying out their duties" (1960, p.131). He notes that most journalists "would wish to see their craft prosper by integrity and fair play, rather than by devotion to profit or through political servitude" (1960, p.131).

In 1946 the editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, Brian Penton was called before the A.J.A. Sydney District Committee to answer a complaint from a source who was named in a story and claimed to have been given an assurance of confidentiality by a *Telegraph* journalist. Penton and his employers refused to recognise the authority of the Ethics Committee. After a protracted legal battle Judge Foster in the Arbitration upheld the rules of the Association, thereby validating the Code of Ethics. Australian Consolidated Press unsuccessfully appealed to the High Court and eventually paid Penton's fine (Sparrow 1960, p.134).

In the early years the Code of Ethics withstood several legal challenges; including one by the Waterside Workers' Federation (Lloyd 1985, p.232) and another by journalist David McNicoll and the proprietors of the *Daily Telegraph* in 1948 (Sparrow 1960, p.134; Lloyd 1985, p.233; Mayer 1964, p.203). McNicoll was held to have breached the code and was fined 50 pounds by the NSW branch of the A.J.A.

The code 'languishing'

By the mid 1970s John Avieson was among those who thought that the 1944 Code of Ethics had not been used effectively and "continues to languish" (Avieson 1978, p.1). He suggested that "there are potentially serious dilemmas for the journalist who seeks to obtain and publish the truth within the prescribed ethical framework" (1978, p.1). Avieson highlighted two basic dilemmas that the code in its 1944 form could not adequately deal with. The first is Rule 3 which he said relied on imprecise definitions of the words "confidence" and "respect" (1978, p.2). The protection of sources therefore relied on the following points being observed by a journalist:

- a) only using the information in accordance with the wishes of the source (respect),
- b) protecting the identity of the informant (confidence), and
- c) how the journalist ultimately determines to use the information (Avieson, 1978, p.2).

While the 1944 version of the code mentioned 'bribes' it said nothing about chequebook journalism. Avieson's second point concerned Rule 6; the use of fair means versus the public benefit of exposing illegal, or immoral behaviour. Avieson wrote, "it would be wrong to allow a rule to aid and abet a wrongdoer" (1978, p.4). Nothing much seems to have changed in almost 20 years. It is the argument that Commissioner Temby put to then *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist, Deborah Cornwall, in attempting to induce her to reveal her police sources to the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption (Patching, Hirst & Koomen, 1994). The Senate Standing Committee's report makes it clear that there will be compulsion to disclose sources where the court considers the information is necessary to meet "the requirements of the proper administration of justice" (*Off The Record*, p.ix)

The 1984 code altered the original 1944 version in a number of ways, importantly updating the language, making it more inclusive by removing the sexist (male) bias and acknowledging Australia's multiculturalism by removing 'gratuitous' references to the racial characteristics of 'subjects' in stories. Clauses covering 'objectivity' (4/1984) and 'death knocks' (9/1984) were included for the

first time. The major structural change in the first revision was to add a Preamble, which appears to be based on clause 4 of the 1944 Code of Ethics:

4/1944: To observe at all times the fraternal obligations arising from his membership of the Association and not on any occasion to take unfair advantage or improper advantage of a fellow member of the Association.

This clause was slightly amended and included in the 1984 Preamble. However, at the same time, the Preamble contained more philosophical clauses about truth and the public's right to know:

All members of the A.J.A. are pledged to stand by their fellow members in observing and enforcing the A.J.A. Code of Ethics. Respect for truth and the public's right to information are overriding principles for all journalists. In pursuance of these principles journalists commit themselves to ethical and professional standards. All members of the A.J.A. engaged in gathering, transmitting, disseminating and commenting on news and information shall observe the following Code of Ethics in their professional activities. They acknowledge the jurisdiction of their professional colleagues in A.J.A. judiciary committees to adjudicate on issues connected with the Code.

As Apps (1990) and Bowman (1990) have argued, this passage did not solve the contradictions in the Code of Ethics. Like the code of 1944 it pushes the burden of proof onto a question of semantics. In an attempt to deal with this limitation, the Preamble has been further refined:

Journalists describe society to itself. They seek the truth. They convey information, ideas and opinions, a privileged role. They search, disclose, record, question, entertain, suggest and remember. They inform citizens and animate democracy. They give a practical form to freedom of expression. Many journalists work in private enterprise, but all have these journalistic responsibilities.

They scrutinise power, but also exercise it, and should be accountable.

Accountability engenders trust. Without trust, journalists do not fulfil their public responsibilities.

MEAA members engaged in journalism commit themselves to:

? honesty

? fairness

? independence

? respect for the rights of others.

In consultation with colleagues they will apply the following standards.

For the first time in the history of the code the new Preamble recognises the public 'duty' of journalists to inform, even if they work for profit-oriented media in the private sector. At the same time it notes that one function of journalism is to "entertain" which is perhaps the most controversial point. It has been included in recognition of the increasing market for so-called 'tabloid journalism' in magazines and 'infotainment' on television. Certainly, the rhetoric of the Preamble has been 'toughened up' and now talks about lofty principles such as "freedom of expression" and animating democracy. The new Code of Ethics appears, at first glance, to support the aims of Julianne Schultz to *revive* the Fourth Estate ideals in a contemporary context, but the question remains: How are these sentiments to be given concrete expression in the commercial reality of today's media organisations?

The buzz words for the 1995 revisions appeared to be "accountability" and "disclosure", but in the new Code there is very little on enforcement beyond moral persuasions (MEAA, 1995a, p.7-10). However, the final report of the MEAA committee that drafted the revised code recommended a strengthening of the union's internal disciplinary procedures (Thompson, 1995, p.6). As one architect of the new code suggested, the changes were an attempt to make "explicit" the standards that were "implicit" in the 1984 code (Chadwick, 1995, p.15). The federal secretary of the Media Alliance, Chris Warren described the

revised code as "workable" ethics for the 21st century (MEAA 1995a, p.7; MEAA 1995b).

The Postscript to the revised code, is also worth mentioning as it attempts to pin down the "overriding" nature of the public's 'right to know', contained in the 1984 Preamble:

Basic values sometimes clash and ethics requires conscientious decision-making in context. Only substantial considerations of public interest or substantial harm to people allows any standard to be overridden.

This statement does not solve the problems of the 1984 Preamble; "Respect for truth and the public's right to information are overriding principles for all journalists". All the Postscript does is slightly shift the ground on which these issues will be debated. Any new interpretation of the code rests on the word "substantial". As Wendy Bacon has pointed out, the language in the revised code is just as vague (if not more so) than in the 1984 version:

We are now told to 'urge', 'guard against', 'disclose' but only where 'relevant' or 'improper'. (We are not told to whom the journalist should disclose or what is regarded as improper). (Bacon 1995, p.13)

The new Code does attempt to come to terms with some of the new conditions that newswriters are operating in: for example it recognises the technological ability of digital processing to alter voices and images. New forms of media technology - including satellites, digital photography, audio-editing techniques and the CD-ROM - would appear to have the potential to blur the boundaries between ethical and unethical behaviour because of the way information and images can be processed, edited and reproduced. As production techniques and delivery systems develop, the ethics debate will have to keep pace. Perhaps, at the start of a new century, the relations of production have leapt ahead of the cultural and political forms - the emotional dialectic - in which journalism expresses itself. Catherine Lumby and John O'Neil (1994, p.153) have pointed out that the rapid rise of tabloid TV in the 1990s began to alter the boundaries in subtle but important ways by injecting 'entertainment' into 'current affairs'.

The Free market and the myth of objectivity

The free market model holds that news is an objective body of truth about the world and that “the task of the journalist is to discover the events which occur and report on them in prose, or on film as faithfully as possible. (Windschuttle, 1988, p.261)

However, because it is technically impossible to cover everything and because many things that happen are everyday and mundane, news production is a process of selection. In the free market model public interest is often equated with 'human interest', which is mainly 'trivia' stories (colour pieces) and the 'important events of the day'. As Windschuttle says:

market forces determine the selection of news and that news itself is [a] more or less objective portrayal of reality. (Windschuttle 1988, p.262)

Humphrey McQueen has provided a penetrating critique of the myth of 'market democracy' and clearly uncovers the dynamic of the 'business' of news production:

The privately owned media are not anti-working class on someone else's behalf. They take the stands they do because of their own interests as big businesses which happen to be newspaper companies...When the media presents unfavourable views of the working class and of socialism, they are doing what comes naturally to capitalists. (McQueen 1977, p.40-41)

The central assumptions of the free market model are that the capitalist, free-market economic system is good and that the social/political status quo should be protected. It is clearly linked to the liberal-democratic myths of individuality/equal rights, and equal access to power through elections. These are the over-riding dynamics driving the emotional attitudes of journalism today. Quite clearly, as McQueen has demonstrated, the emotional dynamic created by the very nature of the news commodity (its 'duality') is what drives newswriters to present “unfavourable” views of class-based issues and organisations. It is precisely these ideological assumptions are at the heart of Schultz' Fourth Estate project:

If it were [seen to be] just another business, the media not only jeopardised its political influence, but also risked regulatory intervention. In the latter decades of the [20th] century, then, the commercial and political advantages to be gained from advocating public service helped revive the ideal [of the Fourth Estate]. (Schultz 1998, p.3)

On the other hand, British media philosopher John O'Neill argues that "the market undermines the relation between journalism and democracy" or, in the terms of a debate about ethics, hinders the production of "quality" news (1992, p.15). This is why I have argued that this contradiction is insoluble in the terms that Schultz has articulated. As O'Neill points out, 'free speech' in the 'free market' immediately runs into the legal problems of ownership, control and access. It is precisely this property right that exerts the 'limiting' influence of economic determination over the emotional dialectic of 'ethics'. Ownership, expressed through property rights, restricts the freedom of those without property and suggests the alternative of a 'socialised' media. Unfortunately, O'Neill himself fails to bridge this contradiction. Instead, in defence of the market system O'Neill suggests it encourages diversity and ensures the role of the media as the 'Fourth Estate' checking on the other three: the executive, legislature and judiciary (1992, p.18). He also ties quality and ethical reporting to the virtues of a good journalist, which he says are honesty, perceptiveness, truthfulness, integrity and the contested virtue 'objectivity'. However, he does have an interesting and slightly different interpretation of 'objectivity'. O'Neill defines objective journalism as a style of reporting that:

best allows the audience to appreciate the complexities of a situation [and] may be better served by non-objective presentation of events.
(O'Neill 1992, p.20)

I have some disagreements with O'Neill's argument that media outputs are consumer-driven (1992, p.22-24). I would argue that the idea that there is a 'sovereign' consumer is a free market myth. As I showed in Chapter 3, the real power is in the hands of those who own the means of journalistic production - that is the whole point of ownership and control - expressed as social control

over the emotional dialectic of the front-page. O'Neill is right to say that the market shapes news values, but producers, not consumers, control this process.

Ethics, quality & democracy

Over its 200-year life, the ideal of the Fourth Estate, has assumed different guises for press barons, politicians and journalists. It has been transmuted over time to incorporate a wide, and at times contradictory, set of meanings. (Schultz 1998, p.49)

Thus, it is clear that the ideological construct - the Fourth Estate - has a chequered history. It has followed a trajectory that closely parallels the shifting emotional dialectic of journalism. As Schultz points out, this has included adapting to fit “the media systems of the twentieth century” (1998, p.49). Can it ‘transmute’ again to fit the media systems of the 21st?

Far from solving ethical problems for journalists, the revised Code of Ethics is just one more element in what the MEAA rightly identifies as the “continuing public debate about the power and accountability of journalists” (MEAA 1995a, p.10). The other issues which the MEAA committee was asked to examine, such as the complaints procedures, the relationship between the Code of Ethics and media institutions, self-regulation and the relationship between the code and the law are not yet resolved.

Who's watching the watchdogs?

An increasingly popular suggestion is for 'independent' watchdog bodies to oversee journalistic practice with “appropriate powers to enforce sanctions” (Littlemore 1995, p.11). The Senate Standing Committee that prepared *Off The Record* concluded that “if the media gets out of hand...then the need for an independent and powerful review body based on statute increases” (*Off The Record*, p.xxiii). This sanction can be avoided if the media (collectively) develops effective self-regulation. In the Committee’s view the media “needs to satisfy the public at large that this can be done without external supervision or a legislatively imposed set of rules” (*Off The Record*, p.xxiv).

Geoff Turner (1994a) has argued for an independent tribunal precisely because of the failure of self-regulation by both proprietors and journalists. His arguments can be summarised in the following points:

- ? that such a "Media Commission" could promote ethical standards and enforce them; that it would "professionalise" journalism and ensure greater "quality";
- ? that a national approach is needed to law reform;
- ? and that the Commission would "balance the dominance of major interests" (1994a, pp.1-12).

Unfortunately, Turner's model has the same shortcomings as that proposed by Stuart Littlemore. The independence of a 'Media Commission is compromised. It is, in fact, government control given that it would be "supervised at arm's length by an all-parties' parliamentary committee" (Turner, 1994a, p.1). Arm's length means close enough for a knockout punch, and a hand on the leash at all times. 'Independent' is one of those loosely-defined words that sounds democratic and principled, but in fact has no real meaning in this debate unless it means *completely* free of political interference. A second element of journalism's emotional dialectic of "ambivalent identity" is that professional regulation brings with it a greater reliance on institutions of the State (Hallin 1994, p.7). When this borrowed "authority of the state" is combined with global media institutions, mainly in private hands, "private power will increasingly eclipse the democratic process" (Hallin 1994, p.8).

I argue that not many journalists would willingly submit themselves to a government-sponsored media tribunal. Should the tribunal also be 'independent' of the journalist's union, or of the employers? If we were to follow Littlemore's or Turner's suggestions there is no way that such a tribunal could be independent of legislators and bureaucrats, who themselves are accountable to virtually no one, except their party hierarchy or the government of the day. Such a situation could easily lead to witch hunts, the persecution of unpopular journalists, blackballing and, ultimately, a tamecat media. There is an argument for revamping and strengthening the judicial procedures of the MEAA, but I can see no justification for taking these matters 'out of house', or for journalists to cede such powers to any outside body.

The other question that Stuart Littlemore raises, in relation to both 'regulation' and the 'professionalism' of journalism is:

Should journalists be subject to the same regulation as medical practitioners and solicitors?

On one hand it's easy to make an argument that journalists "are capable of more harm than negligent chiropodists or dishonest solicitors" (Littlemore 1995, p.11). Medical practitioners can kill with their mistakes and fraudulent solicitors can send people bankrupt. The journalistic equivalent is perhaps to be skewered on one of the commercially oriented current affairs programs. The Senate Standing Committee concluded that doctors, lawyers and priests are entitled to greater privilege because they are subject to far more rigorous selection and training than most journalists (*Off The Record*, p.xii). In light of proceedings before the Wood Royal Commission into the NSW Police Service this point is debatable. However, it is interesting to note that the Committee stops short of recommending licences for journalists and appears to endorse Paul Chadwick's opinion that:

licensing journalists is fraught with risk. Such a scheme may well justly punish the bad journalist for wilful breaches of a code. But it may equally be turned against the ethical journalist when he or she does what a free society expects and unsettles the powerful with accurate disclosures. (Chadwick 1995, p.15)

On the other hand, Stuart Littlemore is right to point out that a code 'owned' by journalists has little power over (and holds little threat for) the likes of Alan Jones and other 'commentators' who are not technically journalists⁷⁷. However, Littlemore makes the mistake of lumping commentators and journalists together. The Australian Broadcasting Authority, the racial and sexual vilification laws, and other such avenues of appeal, can deal with consumer complaints against the Caseys and Joneses of the media world through the station licensing process, but a 'free' media cannot be subject to licence or whim. A Code of Ethics (no matter

⁷⁷ It's not the purpose of this thesis to analyse the likes of Alan Jones and John Laws, but it is interesting that the censure of the journalists' union was of no consequence to them in the "Cash for Comment" matter. They hold unions in general in very poor regard and treat the MEAA with the same contempt they reserve for anyone who gets in their way, or who might dare to stand up to their puerile ranting.

how well enforced by peers) can only be applied to MEAA members. Again, we can see the ways in which the relations of production govern the emotional dialectic. The application of ethics to the news production process is, ultimately, an industrial issue. Media proprietors are free to use their power in any way they like to increase circulation, ratings and ultimately advertising revenues. As former ABC journalist and now Victorian Education Minister Mary Delahunty put it so nicely:

The generals must also submit to an ethical edifice that demands honesty, fairness, independence and respect for the rights of others.
(Delahunty 1995, p.13)

If only they would! It is a comforting thought, a rule that applies across the board, but it will not happen while the functions of social control rest, ultimately, with Capital, rather than with newswriters. What is needed, I argue, is a cultural shift so great that it finally and forever undermines the function of social control and completely alters, irrevocably, the relations of production in the newsroom.

Changing newsroom culture

The news media is now a vast business with its own economic, political, technological and social priorities. The scale and power of the news media threatens to undermine its continued viability as the Fourth Estate. If the ideal is to retain contemporary relevance, the locus of struggle must become a contest within news organisations over editorial independence, commercial priorities, political relevance and the public interest. (Schultz 1998, p.233)

This is the problem in a nutshell. The contest within news organisations can be no less than newswriters' involved in a fundamental contest with Capital over the very issues of social control. The four 'grounds' over which this struggle must be waged - editorial independence, commercial priorities, political relevance and public interest - are at the very terrain of the emotional dialectic and the dialectic of the front-page. It is clear, according to the grey collar thesis that this battle cannot be joined within the 'rules of engagement' dictated by the function of social control. The problem is to resolve this contradiction and it cannot be done within the framework that Schultz endorses: the liberal-

democratic free market model. This whole system is itself a hegemonic ideological construct and while ever the terms of the debate revolve around 'reviving' the discredited Fourth Estate, newswriters cannot win. Having said that it is important to qualify this statement by observing that, ultimately, the battles will be fought initially over these issues. It is only when the emotional dialectic of the newsroom coincides with a more general level of social unrest that real change can occur. This has to be the position of the grey collar public intellectual - pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will.

I come not to revive the Fourth Estate, but to bury it

Instead of trying to revive the discredited idealism of the Fourth Estate we should give it a decent burial and move on. I have always favoured a more radical approach based on shifting the power in the newsroom towards rank and file journalists, away from the corporate cowboys, whose real fascination is with the 'bottom line', not the 'public interest'. Schultz does not rise to the challenge of arguing for an alternative, which spoils (for me) an otherwise interesting and important thesis - the revival of engaging and radical journalism - that does a good job of chronicling the long, often energetic, but now fading life of the Fourth Estate.

Conclusion

What might happen if a system of "workers' control" became the norm in newsrooms and if journalists controlled the news-gathering process itself? A newsroom in which news values, angles, and stories are democratically decided on the "shop floor" might be a very different place to a newsroom where Warren Breed's social control is exercised by managers more in tune with the commercial needs of the organisation (as a capitalist enterprise) than with the needs of a working-class audience. (Hirst 2001, p.68)

On a day-to-day basis the news that the public receives would be noticeably different if journalists were more class-conscious. There would be less news about the 'big end' of town and more about the daily lives of real people in the suburbs, factories and offices. There might also be a shift in the types of stories considered for investigation and certainly there would be a change in the way

politics and economics are covered. It is possible to argue that a fully developed working-class journalism - that was animated by the emotional dialectic of the grey collar intellectual - would be more of a public service and lead to more public good than the journalism that passes for informed public critique today. It is hard, from this vantage point, to predict the ultimate impact of such a cultural shift in the newsroom on the nature of newswork, but one might argue that class-conscious journalism is *better* journalism.

This chapter has argued that the revisions to the Code of Ethics, while important incremental improvements, do not effectively deal with the central contradictions between the economic, informational and ideological 'roles' of the media. While a number of advances can be made through reform, the history of the debate among journalists and media proprietors suggests that such issues will not be dealt with quickly or painlessly (Lloyd 1985: 227-237). In part the answer is for journalists, the Media Alliance, editors and journalism educators to get together and discuss how the culture of newsrooms can be changed. In tertiary programs where ethics is taught as a discrete subject, there also has to be an emphasis on integrating the norms and principles of ethical journalism into the practical aspects of the course. The MEAA, working journalists and journalism educators have a lot more to do in this area. In that sense there needs to be a shift in the way that journalism education is conducted - the contradictions between public interest and profitability cannot be ignored any longer, or simply glossed over with 'if only' statements.

American journalism educator Brian Richardson argues that in too many instances journalists are taught "negative ethics", that is a list of "don'ts" (1994: 109) and he suggests that this practice be changed using a four point guide. The teaching of ethics should be "affirmative", "systematic", "integrative" and "definitive". In short, ethics subjects should teach "what we should do rather than what we should not do". It should "offer a workable, flexible and defensible way to proceed to make ethical decisions". This to me sounds like a plea to fundamentally alter the emotional dialectic that operates in the newsroom. But, as I have suggested throughout this thesis, this cannot be done without a radical shift in the relations of production - the conditions that set the limits to the emotional dialectic.

Richardson argues that ethical practice should be "inseparable from doing good journalism" and through the use of case studies the teaching of ethics should "show not only that ethics is a systematic process, but also that there are right and wrong answers" (Richardson 199: .110). There is no problem with the first three of Richardson's points, but the fourth - the concept of right and wrong answers - is debatable. Australian journalism is perhaps more daring and more adversarial than that practiced in the USA today and I'm not sure that there actually *are* "definitive" solutions to complex situational and contextual problems.

The Australian's resident media commentator, Errol Simper, is right to suggest that the culture of journalism needs to change and that the pressures of newsroom deadlines means that rules are bent in the name of expediency (1995, p.17). It's also relevant to ask if an alternative news culture is possible. This chapter suggests that an important first step is to show how the news culture inside media organisations is ultimately dependent on the economic and social relations that govern news-gathering as a daily production process.

There is a solution that could help solve ethical dilemmas in the newsroom, but which in the current political climate some critics would argue is immensely impractical. I am suggesting that there is no reason why journalists' House Committees in each workplace cannot act as a place of review and discussion on ethical questions. The Media Alliance might consider developing a short-course for in-house training. A similar package has been developed as a module of a Graduate Certificate in Communication through CSU (Patching, Hirst & Koomen, 1994).

The proposal is radical because it consciously involves creating a greater level of workers' control in newsrooms. I argue this case here briefly based on two considerations:

First, my belief in humanist socialism, which has informed this thesis from, page one. By elevating and celebrating the role of grey collar intellectuals such as Orwell and Pilger (among many others) in journalism courses it is possible to promote these humanist values and also to ground young journalists in the

emotional dialectic that will increase their ability to 'read' the news from a more class-conscious perspective;

Second, my experience at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the Special Broadcasting Service where ethical behaviour is reinforced by peer pressure and where commercial considerations are more likely to surface as ethical problems (Hirst, 1994).

In order to achieve such changes, the culture of the newsroom would be altered by a fundamental shift in the power relationships that are central to the production process. The exercise of social control would shift from Capital to labour. However, such a shift will not be easy as it involves an attack on the business interests of the media owners. It is more likely to happen in a situation of social crisis affecting all relations of production.

While we can argue eternally about the definition, meaning and desirability of 'democracy' O'Neill argues against a simple "bi-polar" vision of a choice between state-control along what we might call 'Stalinist' lines and state-control combined with competing blocks of capital in the 'free market' model. He suggests that there are more democratic alternatives:

Non-market, socialised and decentralised media serving the goals of both journalism and democracy as a forum are not a political impossibility. (O'Neill 1992, p.27)

My own preference is for popularly elected editors (perhaps elected by the journalists themselves)! This may seem a utopian suggestion, but the only certain thing in this uncertain world is that 'things' are changing, including how we view the media, journalism and ethics.

Chapter 8

Killing me softly with his words: Doing violence to the truth

If 'Conflict' is the highest criterion for news in Australia, and if it is understood as an extension of the 'physical violence associated with war', then there may be an explanation why the language of violence and killing is deemed acceptable scholarship in journalism education. (Hartley 1999, p.232)

La lotta continua: 'Media Wars' revisited

This chapter takes a slight detour and revisits a debate between journalism educators and cultural studies that flared in the late 1990s, culminating in a one day conference at QUT in November 1998, *Media Wars: Media Studies and Journalism Education* and the aftermath. This debate has not gone away, though perhaps passions have cooled a little. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the spaces that this debate prised open in the academic discourse about the relevance of 'theory' to the study of journalism and to begin the articulation of my grey collar thesis into that discussion. The materialist theory behind the grey collar thesis is implicit in this chapter and informs my critique of cultural studies.

A couple of years ago, in the well-known Australian journal of cultural studies, *Continuum* 13(2), prominent cultural and media theorist, Professor John Hartley claimed that I wanted to kill him. If not in body, at least in spirit:

Why is it scholarship when someone wants to kill you? I am interested in this question because the 'you' in this case is me... What is Martin's contribution? He wants to kill me. (Hartley 1999, p.227,

229)

Of course, John won't call the police because he recognises a metaphor when it rears up to bite him in the butt. He is hurt because journalism educators, me among them expressed our concern at Hartley's previous comments about journalism education being a theoretical wasteland, a *terra nullius* (Hartley 1995; Hirst 1998b, Hirst 1998c). More seriously, he characterises journalism as a discourse of violence, journalists as inherently violent and journalism educators as dumb hicks whose only protection in the jungle of modern academia is the good offices of cultural theorists like him. He patronisingly wants to save us from ourselves:

Sometimes it is useful to have someone around [like Hartley's media theorists] who knows how universities work, how to pitch a proposal in the appropriate way, how to make professional and vocational offerings, despite their great expense and small scholarly output, fit into institutional mission statements that include research and publication but not shorthand and 'handout'. (Hartley 1999, p.229)

It's enough to make one want to choke the silly bastard (metaphorically speaking). I feel that John has misrepresented journalism educators in general (and me in particular) in order to make a dramatic point:

They are also journalism educators, and as such are committed to the use of 'active voice, short sentences, concrete nouns and verbs, precise grammar and clear meaning' (Windschuttle 1998a, p.31)⁷⁸. If their meaning is 'clear', then clearly I have been issued a death threat. (Hartley 1999, p.231)

Obviously I don't want to 'kill' John Hartley, or injure him in any way, but I do think serious issues raised in my chapter *From Gonzo to PoMo: Hunting new journalism* (Hirst 1998b⁷⁹), have not been seriously addressed by John in his

⁷⁸ The reference here is to Windschuttle's chapter in the Breen collection: *Cultural studies versus journalism* (Windschuttle 1998c).

⁷⁹ As I explained in that chapter I was deliberately writing in a Gonzo style in an attempt to enliven what might otherwise have been another earnest volume of 'theory'. I had the full support

reply (Hartley 1999). Firstly, Hartley tends to lump all journalism scholars into one camp; a homogeneous cohort of jumped up newsroom brawlers:

If Breen, Hirst, Windschuttle, Patching, Masterton and Blood do not speak for journalism theory, do not accurately 'represent' it, then let others step up. (Hartley 1999, p.234)

I want to make it quite clear that there is a debate *within* Australian journalism theory, as well as *between* journalism educators and cultural theorists. There are at least three distinct theoretical positions within journalism scholarship and neither Keith Windschuttle, Warwick Blood, Roger Patching nor I, would claim to speak on behalf of all journalism scholars in Australian universities. I, for one, am unashamedly a Marxist, steeped in the materialist method and (I believe) theoretically quite sophisticated, Windschuttle has abandoned his materialist past (as typified by his seminal book, *The Media* first published in 1984). Keith is now more comfortable as a fellow traveller of the cold war dinosaurs that produce *Quadrant* magazine. I am now almost alone at the far-left end of the journalism theory perspective; my nearest neighbour is without a doubt Katrina Mandy Oakham from Deakin University (see Oakham 1998; 2001). It is fair to say that Windschuttle and I are representative of two positions in journalism theory: diametrically opposed on some issues, but sharing a common belief that John Hartley epitomises an imperialistic push by cultural studies into our “patch” (Hirst 1998c). The third position (and there are no doubt others) is somewhere between ‘hard core’ journalism theory and cultural studies. Indeed I would classify myself as an ‘almost’ member of this camp - I do not dismiss entirely a cultural studies approach to journalism and news work. The grey collar thesis does not work without this component, hence my interest in Gramsci, Raymond Williams and a host of other ‘cultural’ theorists, including Hartley, Lumby and Wark. Hartley has characterised journalism education as an epistemological wasteland (Hartley 1995, 1997), a *terra nullius* unoccupied and open to the

of the editor Myles Breen in taking that approach. The fictionalised asides involving “Ed Hunt” were a demonstration of the Gonzo style - see *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (Thompson 1998) - the use of ‘violent’ language a parody of the Thompionesque technique.

civilising, colonising forces of cultural theory. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Hartley refuses to acknowledge that as journalism educators we are academics, even scholars in our own right. All we want is the right to some theoretical space of our own: space that John Hartley and his fellow travellers in cultural studies are seeking to deny us. Throughout his recent works, John Hartley is dismissive of what a group of journalism scholars attempted to do in the book *Journalism: Theory & Practice* (Breen 1998) - to extend our theoretical understanding of journalism as a social and cultural practice. Hartley describes journalism educators as “an armed rabble...disguising themselves as scholars” (Hartley 1999, p.227) as “journalists (as opposed to theorists)” (p.228); as “media practitioners”, in short, as anything except members of the academy with equal standing alongside cultural theorists.

What journalism educators do is dismissed as “vocational programmes and practical courses” (Hartley 1999, p.229), which are “quite hard to teach in the context of universities” (p.233). The implication, quite clearly, is that, as *journalism educators* we have no right to develop our own theory. As mere *practitioners* we should leave the hard stuff (theorising) to professors of cultural studies and be grateful when they tell us *what to think about* and *how to think* about it. “Please sir, can I have more?”

The plain fact - in an “active voice, short sentence, concrete nouns and verbs, precise grammar and clear meaning” (Windschuttle 1998c) kind of way - is simply this:

Some of us in journalism scholarship disagree with John Hartley’s version(s) of journalism theory and want the chance to present our own worldview. If there’s debate and argument, fine, but don’t try to shut us up with paternalistic gobbledy-gook, misrepresentation and downright lies.

Looking back from *terra nullius*: Journalism, Modernity and the ‘Vacant’ Lot.

When it appeared in March 1998, Keith Windschuttle’s defence of journalism education against an apparent imperialistic encroachment by cultural studies (1998a, p.41), created a storm of protest from cultural studies theorists. So hurt

were these poor thinkers - faced with journalistic violence - that they felt compelled to gang up on him in the following week's Higher Education supplement in the *Australian* newspaper, (Cunningham & Flew 1998) and on the newspaper's web comment page.

My Windschuttle - right or wrong

If you deny the existence of all facts and truths then you become a genuine paranoid fantasist because you can't be sure of such well-known facts as Hitler lost the Second World War or Elvis is really dead. Even though news-making is a highly selective, socially constructed and often politically biased process, the events it describes occur in the real world that is itself independent of the news-making process. (Windschuttle 1999, p.13)

If this is Keith Windschuttle's 'right wing' defence of journalism, it sounds OK to me. Having now read *both* versions of Windschuttle's article (1998a; 1998b), as well as his paper from Media Wars⁸⁰ (Windschuttle 1999) and the various replies, it is indeed with faint praise that I find myself damning Keith, while supporting my 'friend', who is also 'my enemy's enemy'. I find much in Windschuttle's argument that I whole-heartedly agree with, but there is also plenty that I cannot go along with. And while I acknowledge that some media theory is good for journalism students, I question the usefulness and validity of much that the postmodernists believe in.

My response to the discussion so far is divided into 'What Windschuttle got right' and 'What Windschuttle got wrong' in order to flesh out a third position critical of both⁸¹.

⁸⁰ For some reason this piece did not appear in the special edition of Media International Australia that purported to be a 'record' of the discussions in Brisbane.

⁸¹ At the time this debate surfaced in 1998, Keith Windschuttle acknowledged to me, *when I checked with him*, that he'd been too busy to read the more detailed arguments in *Popular Reality* (Hartley 1996). To be fair Windschuttle also pointed out that one of his detractors had read an annotated html version of his piece (taken out of context and with comments from Charles Stuart inserted into it). He also says that this person quoted some of Stuart's words as if they were his. *So much for accuracy on both sides!* I've tried not to misrepresent the various positions

I am critical of what I regard as an attempt by cultural studies to colonise the *terra nullius* of journalism theory (Hartley 1996, p.39) and argue strongly for journalism education's right to be taken seriously in universities, as a legitimate *cross-disciplinary* discipline. My opposition to cultural studies is not based on any old journalistic notion of defending a 'patch', it is the result of my disagreement with the 'outcomes' of their theorising (Hirst 1998b; Hirst 1998c).

I'm equally critical of Windschuttle's unsupportable assertion that "[journalists] report not to please their employers or advertisers, nor to serve the state or support some other cause, but in order to inform their audience" (1998b, p.11). I don't think it is possible to mount a solid defence of journalism education, or journalism, from this ideologically limited perspective. As discussed in the previous chapter, notions of 'objectivity' and 'ethics' are extremely problematic and open to a range of interpretations (Hirst 1997; King 1997) and journalism academics continue to seriously discuss the implications of this for the profession (Herbert 1997). I have shown throughout the body of this thesis that my grey collar perspective allows for a new interpretation of these issues outside the liberal-democratic paradigm of the Fourth Estate. Incidentally, one of my criticisms of both Windschuttle and the postmodernists is that ultimately they fall back on this position to defend their competing claims for journalism.

Journalism is not an easy pursuit of the 'truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth'. As I have argued throughout the body of this work, the practices of newswriters are problematic. Theorising these practices is made more complex by the historically shifting material and social conditions in which news-gatherers operate and in which the news is published or broadcast. Journalism's place in higher education is also problematic from both a theoretical perspective (What is journalism theory?) and practically (How do you teach journalism?). There is a tradition of addressing these issues (Breen 1998; Tapsall & Varley

mentioned here by referencing all quotes and letting the protagonists speak for themselves. I've also read *Popular Reality* and mentioned it in several published commentaries (*see* Guerke & Hirst 1996; Hirst 1998b).

2001)⁸². Journalism theory is in good hands and many excellent journalism educators are themselves former reporters and editors who want to make journalism better.

My purpose here is to examine some of these issues, all of which revolve around a 'modernist' versus 'postmodernist' axis. This is not my choice, it's indicative of the time of our lives. However, I have made a definite choice in terms of my own position.

In the shadow of *Popular Reality*: Playing on Hartley's vacant lot

To most consumers of the media, journalism seems easy...Of course, had Hartley ever been employed on a newspaper or at a television station he would never have entertained any of this. He would have known that what appears to be the work of celebrities, such as actors and sports stars, is actually done behind the scenes by journalists.

(Windschuttle 1999, p.19)

On reading 'Media's theoretical breakdown' (Windschuttle 1998a, pp.41,42,43) my initial reaction was to leap to Keith's side and cheer his critique of media studies/cultural studies theorists. I share his cautious scepticism towards some of the more outrageous claims of postmodernism and agree it's little more than an intellectual fad, which like all fashion will pall, with time. However, the piece in *The Australian* was an edited version of an earlier paper Keith had given at a Journalism Education Association conference in 1995 and that had also appeared in *Quadrant* (Windschuttle 1998b, pp.11-18). The truncated version omits references to John Hartley's piece in the *Australian Journal of Communication* (1995, pp.20-30) which are in the *Quadrant* version.

This is a significant omission from *The Australian*'s 'debate' because in their reply Stuart Cunningham and Terry Flew refer to several points from Windschuttle's longer *Quadrant* article and from Hartley's book, *Popular Reality* (1996). Cunningham and Flew raise the following issues:

⁸² These issues have also been addressed in *Australian Journalism Review* and *Australian Studies in Journalism*, particularly from about 1994 to 1999.

?? the “hard news” paradigm is under threat from “the rise of lifestyle journalism, celebrity journalism and the intermeshing of journalism with the ‘persuasion industries’”;

?? according to Hartley, journalism can be characterised as one of the “smiling professions” (Is this not similar to Althusser’s ‘ideological state apparatuses’?);

?? journalism is the suburban vernacular in which “modernity” converses with itself.

Further, this “modernist-realist model of journalism”, as a cultural form of ‘news’ *in the public interest*, is challenged by “changes in the industry itself”. Modestly, given Hartley’s own position, Cunningham and Flew then argue:

It becomes clear [from Hartley’s analysis] that the erosion of “hard news” paradigm is not the result of white-anting by postmodernists.
(Cunningham and Flew 1998, p.41)

As I have argued at various points in this thesis, postmodernism is fundamentally flawed by its reliance on a one-dimensional and ultimately determinist view of the media arts broadly and journalism in this particular instance. As I have demonstrated in relation to the duality of Raymond Williams and the work of John Hinkson and others, the determinism of postmodernist thought is *both cultural and technological*. John Hartley provides a clear statement of this in *Popular Reality* (1996). Postmodernism is “linguistic idealism” in practice and it assumes the dominant ‘text’ thesis in the following terms:

Culture ? the discursive, media, knowledge-producing and sense-making sphere of life ? might itself determine such matters as class, conflict and the state. (Hartley 1996, p.237)

Catharine Lumby epitomises the technological determinist paradigm when she writes that the “public sphere itself...has been substantially remodelled” by advances in communication technologies (Lumby 1999, p.xi). This is Hartley’s technologically determined, domesticated and de-centred “mediasphere” where we (couch potatoes all!) experience our lives “at a distance” and through the Warkian process of “telesthesia” (Wark 1994, p.43). Ours is - according to the

postmodernists - an age when “cultural studies has arrived, like the owl of Minerva”, and “culture too abstracts itself from all particularity” (Wark 1994, p xiii).

It is important to note that Windschuttle’s is not the first, nor the perhaps the best critique of postmodern theory. Though he certainly keeps company with a similar-toned piece by Peter Smyth in *Australian Rationalist*, Summer 1997-98. It is a wide-ranging attack on postmodernists who, Smyth says, “prefer to proclaim their relativism proudly and noisily? [and] seem to find the mixture of postmodernism and relativism rather exhilarating” (1998, p.35). Nor is John Hartley the only postmodernist taking on the conservative critics. In the same issue of *AR* ‘media theorist’ McKenzie Wark replies to Smyth in a typically confusing and ‘hyper-relativist’ fashion in his piece “The postmodernist Eddie Mabo goes to court”:

So while the Mabo decision is a step towards justice in recognising this other right, it is a step away from justice in the inability to hear that claim on its own terms? Perhaps justice is something always deferred, always awaiting a new decision that will amend the faults of the last one? justice is the utopia working within [the law] that must be respected if the law is to serve justice at all, rather than merely serving vested interests. (Wark 1998a, p.44)

What strikes me about this passage, apart from really wanting to ask how Wark knows for sure that the late Eddie Mabo was a postmodernist, is that “Mabo” is abstracted from the social relations of racist Australia. The legal case is elevated to the plane of ‘ethical’ discussion. Wark’s position is to ultimately treat the Mabo ‘story’ as just another idealised *text* open to his, and therefore anyone’s, ‘relativist’ interpretation.

This position is taken to its (il)logical conclusion in Wark’s contribution to the great ‘Oz demolition derby’ in which the main object was to stop Keith Windschuttle at all costs (that way everyone else wins, until next time). Wark’s intervention, a column in *The Australian*’s HES, “Students deconstruct media thesis” (Wark 1998b) is a seemingly random collection of comments from media studies students who were given Windschuttle’s piece to read in class. I’m sure a

few of us got a moment's pleasure trying to guess the second names of Ken's famous friends, but what are to we make of these gems:

Stuart wonders who Althusser is. Nobody else has heard of him either? Megan thinks it strange that a story in a newspaper should be 'about things that all happened ages ago' Why is any of this news? [Megan] thinks Windschuttle is out of touch and obsessed with things about his own past.?

[Windschuttle's] use of Martin Heidegger's Nazi associations strikes Virginia as guilt by association. She thinks this is "tabloid" and "cheap". Hassan thinks it "typical" that a middle-aged white man dismisses criticism of the media from marginal people.

? Kate "hates theory" and just wants to get on with it. ? Helen? thinks it sinister that [Windschuttle] only permits questioning of other people's grasp of the truth while his relation to his own truth is "unthinking" (Wark 1998b, p.40)

I can understand changing the names, but Ken, did say they *read* the Windschuttle piece? There's nothing in Wark's column to indicate where the tutorial discussion might have ended, but I must wonder if he let each 'relative' truth in the statements above stand, or did he point out the misunderstandings as expressed by his students of "media studies".

It is cultural studies fixation with the 'relativity' of the 'real' and conceptualisations of 'truth' that Windschuttle correctly identifies as problem for postmodernists. It is also one that his detractors, including Ken Wark (1998a; 1998b) pretend doesn't exist. As Windschuttle says, the "appeal" of postmodernism lies in its "linguistic idealism, that is, in the notion that the world is nothing but a text and that the way to study it is by textual analysis" (Windschuttle 1998b, p.14).

While Windschuttle is 'maintaining the rage' against postmodernism, post-structuralists and the poverty of media theory; perhaps he has also forgotten his own materialist analysis of the press, radio and television in Australia, which was last published only 10 short years before media wars ignited the debate once more (*The Media*, 1984 and 3rd. edition in 1988). The text is on most journalism

reading lists, usually alongside Cunningham and Turner's *The Media in Australia: Industries, Texts, Audiences*, (1993). It's a fair comparison.

The (journalist) Huns are inside the walls (of the academy)

I first read Windschuttle while completing my undergraduate journalism degree at NSWIT (now UTS) in the early 1980s and today recommend it to my students. I have previously taught communication subjects using Cunningham and Turner as a set text and have read *Virtual Geography* (Wark 1994), along with my students in a postgraduate journalism theory subject. We agreed to disagree with most of it. However, "we no longer have roots, we have aērals", was a lively discussion-starter. The point is that all of these texts have some merit and address similar issues, though from divergent starting points.

I agree with Cunningham and Flew (1998), that there is no evidence of a media studies conspiracy against journalism. However, the validity of journalism educators' theoretical grasp on their subject is questioned by the media studies/cultural studies tradition that Windschuttle identifies in Australia.

Part of the 'real' debate is over the recognition of professional experience as a suitable 'alternative' to postgraduate qualifications. It has held back many fine teachers and scholars. One of the saddest stories is that of our late friend, Dr Charles Stuart whose vast knowledge of journalism, from both sides, was as legendary as his red braces and silver ponytail. But even this does not go far enough.

Cunningham and Flew describe Windschuttle's "attack" on cultural studies as:

...a subset of the wider debate about the relationship between vocational and generalist or liberal arts education in an Australian higher education system under pressure to deliver vocational relevance as much as intellectual stimulation to its student 'clientele'. (Cunningham & Flew 1998, p.41)

This is self-evident, but not particularly helpful. Neither is Windschuttle's suggestion that journalism educators stand at the gates to the academic citadel and shout out to students warning them of the evils of cultural studies:

One strategy would be to try to influence demand by enlightening the

potential customers [about] just how far removed from reality [cultural studies] has become. (Windschuttle 1998a, p.43)

Both positions would have us deal pragmatically with ‘market forces’. In some tertiary institutions this means transforming ‘teaching’ into ‘marketing courses’ and ‘research’ into ‘industry-partnerships’. Industrially and bureaucratically it’s a nightmare and those of us ‘on the waterfront’ of higher education will have to deal with it at sometime in the future:

...in the absence of a serious challenge, a new breed of university administrators, a managerial elite, filled the vacuum, bringing with them a style of doing business at variance with the very ideal of collegiality.

Line control, “performance bonuses” and “production targets” replaced the reciprocal loyalty which had previously tied the top of the university to the community of scholars who do most of the work. (Siracusa 2002, p.2)

In light of Siracusa’s dire prognosis for higher education - and in purely a pragmatic way - we could say that cultural studies needs the vocational support offered by journalism, public relations, writing, advertising and professional communication skills taught in the post-Dawkins universities.

I interpret Hartley’s claims for cultural studies as the *theoretical engine* of journalism education as a cynical ploy to convince university administrators that journalism education is purely vocational. As Siracusa points out, it is precisely the humanities (history, literary studies and cultural studies) that are under threat from the “mad rush to commercialise the campus” (2002, p.2). In Hartley’s schema journalism students are a captive audience for cultural studies theorists. Thus the vociferous tone in Hartley’s dismissal of journalists turned academics as intellectually and organisationally lightweight and a ‘vacant lot’, a *terra nullius* to be occupied by cultural studies theorists, just like himself (1996, p.39). It’s an interesting use of a legal phrase that for so long was used to justify the colonisation and oppression of indigenous Australia.

While it’s convenient for some that journalism education in Australia be regarded as ‘vacant’ land it is far from the truth. Nor is the situation unique to

Australia. Betty Medsger's report for the American think-tank, the Freedom Forum highlighted institutional recognition, the qualifications debate and intellectual legitimacy as issues for American journalism education (see *Winds of Change*, Medsger 1996).

A journalism 'body of knowledge'

Journalism practitioners, students and educators need to enhance their understanding of the institution of journalism and its place in society...Those committed to a news that matters must develop better ways of assessing, evaluating, and articulating the purpose and practice of journalism. (Tapsall & Varley 2001, p.v)

This was the 'call to arms' in Suellen Tapsall and Carolyn Varley's edited edition of journalism theory published in 2001. In fact there is a growing body of solid material written about journalism by Australian journalism educators. Many of these books are widely available and students are encouraged to read them. They are not 'how to' books devoted to lead writing and the 'inverted pyramid'; though these have their place in the *vocational aspects* of a journalism education. Most journalism theory books encourage their readers to 'question everything' about the industry, its history and ideas like: '*What makes a good journalist?*' Or perhaps how such a person might be set apart from the smiling professions of entertainment and public relations. It is no longer the case that journalism is the poor theoretical cousin in the academy. In Australia the vast majority of journalism educators are personally known to me and most, if not all, of them have completed PhDs and published widely in journals and books. They are acutely conscious of the need to develop a wider understanding, not for their own benefit, but for the future of journalism.

Hartley's feigned innocence

A self-described "hapless" Professor Hartley asserts that he's no more than an unsuspecting "patsy" for the vitriol of disgruntled journalism educators waiting "in the woods" for "some unsuspecting cultural studies fop - as luck would have it me - to happen by" (Hartley 1999, p.227). This overlooks the fact that he started the so-called "media wars" with some damaging and ill-considered comments about journalism education being a "terra nullius" in his *AJC* piece

and again in *Popular Reality* (Hartley 1995; 1996), To my knowledge John has not resiled from this comment. He makes an oblique reference to the special issue of *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, where his thesis is critiqued by journalism educators (see Hirst 1998c), but does not challenge anything any of us said about his “theory” in that volume. Elsewhere he insinuates that the peer review process for *APME* is somehow fraudulent (Hartley 1999, p.234).

Instead of dealing with the specifics of our criticism Hartley repeats the ill-founded comment that journalism education is merely “vocational” and needs the “theoretical” support of cultural studies to keep a foothold in the academy. He asserts that a journalism educator’s place in Australian higher education is tenuous at best and in need protecting by cultural theorists, because of journalism education’s “great expense and small scholarly output” (Hartley 1999, p.229). In fact journalism education is in pretty good shape scholarship-wise. Oxford University Press has recently published a second volume of Australian journalism “theory” (Tapsall & Varley 2001) and we have two lively journals (*Australian Journalism Review* and *Australian Studies in Journalism*); many of us are published regularly in *MIA* and other journals, both locally and overseas. Internationally journalism is well established, Professor Hartley was, until recently, in the School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Wales in Cardiff. Journalism is taught at over seven hundred institutions in the United States. If anything, one could argue that it is journalism that props up media and cultural studies in many universities.

“Kill the fucker first

As Ed falls into an alcoholic stupor, I can’t resist recording his last words on the subject. ‘Damn snake, it’ll bite you every time. Unless you kill the fucker first.’ (Hirst 1998b, p.217)

John implies this is statement from my chapter in *Journalism: Theory and Practice* is a direct reference to him, it's not. Nowhere in ‘From Gonzo to PoMo’ (Hirst 1998b) do I express a wish to kill John Hartley or do him harm. The

context for ‘kill the fucker first’ is the last words of Ed Hunt⁸³ before he passes out in an alcoholic stupor - among the last words in the chapter. Ed’s referring to a snake and the sequence relates to the opening of the piece in which Ed first appears with a dead snake recovered from under the seat of his car (Hirst 1998b, p.196). Despite what his massive professor’s ego might be subconsciously telling him, the ‘snake’ is not John Hartley.

It is Hartley’s ideas that I was talking about ‘taking by the throat’, not his physical person. Even in the section of *From Gonzo to Pomo* that Hartley quotes this is obvious:

I’d like to take Hartley by the throat, shake him like a wounded animal and chew on the meagre evidence he offers to defend his thesis...but there’s no point. My urges are more primal and I harbour an ugliness that demands a response. I want to rip the heart out of Hartley’s claims for this “new” “postmodern” journalism’ (Hirst 1998b, as cited in Hartley 1999, emphasis added)

Gonzo & Hunting

The ‘hunting’ in the title of my chapter does have a double meaning, but not in the way John Hartley implies: it is not about hunting him down, he is not the quarry in this chase. It’s about hunting (searching for) new journalism in Australia and in fact the bulk of my chapter is dedicated to this historical/theoretical search. Secondly it’s a reference to Hunter S Thompson, the inventor of gonzo journalism. I can only assume from Hartley’s comments that he’s never read *Fear and loathing in Las Vegas*, or *Hell’s Angels, a strange and terrible saga*, or in fact any of Thompson’s vast oeuvre. If he had, he would

⁸³ I made it clear in the biographical note supplied for *Journalism Theory and Practice* that Ed Hunt is a pseudonym for a friend of mine who was ‘helping’ me with the final draft of the chapter. The whole piece was written with my tongue firmly in my cheek (despite Hartley’s failure to see any humour in it) and with a deliberate ‘Gonzo’ style. This was discussed with Myles Breen before publication and was designed to provide a lighter, alternative voice to the weighty and more ‘academic’ style of some of the other chapters. In my view this does not detract from the seriousness of the underlying methods and analysis.

understand where the “violent” allusions come from. What part of the phrase “piss take” doesn’t the professor understand?

‘Breaker’ Hirst

‘The duty of the journalism educator is to break the aspirant for the employer, to toughen them up for the hard-knocks and the door-knocks, to create the insular, inward-looking culture of the journalist-insider who must keep at arm’s length both their public and their sources.’ (Hartley 1999, p.233)

I find this assertion insulting. Is this the pedagogical instruction that Professor John Hartley, at the time the *Head of School* of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies at Cardiff University, gives to his journalism staff? I hope not! The suggestion that journalism education is about “breaking” cadets for employers is basically just a lie and a dreadful misrepresentation of what journalism educators do. We teach critical theory as well as the skills-based “how to” of news gathering and news writing. I have taught journalism *theory and practice* in three universities, Charles Sturt in Bathurst, the University of Western Sydney and now at the University of Queensland, in each place there is an institutional emphasis on blending theory and practice. I know this is common in journalism courses around the country: a lot of my colleagues are ex-journos and concerned about many of the same issues as cultural theorists, “critical activity” and thinking about the social functions of news discourse as Hartley puts it (1982, p.10). All John Hartley has to do is ask and we will provide the information. Journalism courses expose students to a variety of theoretical perspectives, including Hartley’s. In 1999 I set *Popular Reality* as a reading for a subject called *Writing the modern*. It was co-taught with my colleague Dr Maria Angel and my contribution was to theorise journalism’s relationship to modernity and the 20th century. Most (if not all) journalism degrees also involve students completing at least a sub-major in another discipline: often media or cultural studies, but encompassing a range of humanities, business and science subjects. We also teach media law and ethics, so students get a healthy dose of philosophy too.

I am horrified and insulted by the suggestion that my teaching practice involves destroying the young minds of independent thinking students in my care: turning them into automatons who will do the bidding of James Packer or Lachlan Murdoch. My students would just laugh at such a suggestion. I'm forever telling them to think about journalism critically and politically: to see it as an ideological discourse supporting capitalism. My whole aim in teaching is to 'subvert the dominant paradigm'. Or, in the terminology of the grey collar thesis, to shift the emotional dialectic in the direction of a proletarian class-consciousness. I make it very clear that I want them to go out there and subvert modern journalism, though most of them would prefer a job on *Entertainment Tonight*! I have, over a number of years, exposed my students to the logic behind the formulation of the grey collar thesis. I never tire of talking about the importance of union membership and worker solidarity in the newsroom (Hirst 1997, 2001). By passing on the benefits of my experience as a reporter and editor and using critical pedagogy, I hope to give future news-hounds the tools to get jobs in the mainstream media. If they also feel empowered and passionate enough to want to change journalism that's a good result all round!

You're history

Hartley suggests that journalism is ahistorical in that practitioners and educators neglect their own history. There's no evidence for this. To champion my own small contribution, in 1998 I presented a paper at a conference devoted to media history and journalism was a big part of it. My paper, which provides the foundations for chapter six of this thesis examined and theorised the ways in which newswriters use history to frame their reporting of contemporary political crises. In particular how the constitutional crisis of 1975 has become an integral frame of reference for reporting of the republic debate. My current research is examining the history of the larrikin tradition in the Australian news media and the impact of literary and 'new' journalism on Australian newswriters. I'm not alone in this, a number of journalism educators have made important contributions to the history of Australian journalism.

Denis Cryle's book, *A Disreputable Profession* (1997), is a fantastic history of journalism in colonial Australia. Clem Lloyd's *Parliament and the Press* (1988)

is a history of the federal press gallery. Lloyd (1985) has also written an account of the journalists' union as has. Geoff Sparrow's classic (1960) on the early history of the Australian Journalists' Association is still a valuable source. Neville Petersen's history of the ABC news service, *News not Views* (1993) is on reading lists at many universities. Neville is a former ABC television reporter and foreign correspondent, now completing his PhD. Bob Raymond's two volume memoirs (1992, 1999) chart his days as a war correspondent and as a pioneer of Australian television journalism. The recent collection edited by Curthoys and Schultz (1998) also makes an important contribution to this continuing academic exercise. This is just a short list taken from the shelves of my study (only the titles I can quickly remember, not the full catalogue that I've collected). John Tebbutt, a journalism educator at Monash University (and former journalist) is writing a PhD on the history of Australian war correspondents. I've heard his presentations on the subject and they're full of both history and theory.

My own PhD research has been very much about theorising journalism as a labour process and using journalists as sources for this historical account. It is Hartley's ahistorical caricature of journalism education that in fact neglects - because it doesn't fit his argument - the rich history of journalism, journalists and journalism education.

Vogueing with the professor **Or, the origins "postmodern journalism"**

Hartley implies that "postmodern journalism" is my phrase, "what Hirst calls 'Hartley's Postmodern Journalism'" (Hartley 1999, p.231), when in fact the term is his, from *Popular Reality* (pp.126-153). My chapter (Hirst 1998b) - which Hartley finds so insulting - is, among other things, an argument against this "theory" of postmodern journalism, which Hartley defines as "capitalized cultural studies, semiotics with funding". Postmodern journalism is, he continues:

...a carefully controlled textualization of politics for a popular readership which is highly literate in a mediasphere where scholarship has scarcely ventured. (Hartley 1997, p.127)

That is of course any scholarship other than his brand of media theory. I point out in *From Gonzo to PoMo* (Hirst 1998b) that the evidence for this claim is very thin and based on *one* edition of *Vogue* magazine guest-edited by Nelson Mandela that, in Hartley's view, marks "a decisive shift from modernist to postmodern journalism" (Hartley 1997, p.126).

The comment about "semiotics with funding" also goes to Hartley's argument about the competition for research funding in our higher education institutions. Hartley appears confident that cultural studies is now part of the orthodox research establishment and journalism education an uncouth, brash outsider demanding money with menaces, or at least under false pretences. It is difficult for journalism educators to get ARC grants, true. Difficult, but not impossible. Former journalism lecturer at QUT, Cratis Hippocrates was the recipient of a large and successful grant for a project on civic journalism, the first of its kind in Australia and very successful - it won a United Nations media award. Others have had similar success. Some of us, particularly younger academics, are still in the process of completing our PhD research (after already enjoying successful careers in journalism). We too will one day gain access to the gravy train: with or without professor Hartley's "help" and patronage.

"Vogue. Strike a pose" (Madonna)

The references to *Vogue*, Nelson Mandela and "pretty pictures" in both *Popular Reality* (Hartley 1996) and *Why is it Scholarship?* (Hartley 1999, p.231 & 233) deserve some serious attention given Hartley's belief that the publication of one glossy fashion magazine marks a decisive break with the modernist tradition of journalism. He describes *Vogue* as "one of France's most successful semiotic and commercial exports" (Hartley 1997, p.125). But *Vogue* isn't French! The magazine began in America in 1892 and was bought by *British-based* international publishing giant Conde Nast in 1909 (Talese 1986, p.157). OK, so there's a French edition, but there's also American, British and Australian *Vogue*. It's also published in Russian, Spanish, Italian, Japanese, Korean and Chinese too. One thing I am sure of, copy is syndicated between these various "national" editions and advertising is booked globally too.

However, none of this should worry the semiotician John Hartley who claims "textual analysis as my method" (1999, p.231). Well journalism theory too uses

semiotics and textual analysis. As I have consistently emphasised throughout this work, the grey collar thesis is *dependent* on a blending of these *culturological* (Schudson 1997, pp.7-22) methods with those of political economy and media sociology. The construction of my emotional dialectic and the dialectic of the front-page would not have been possible without this cross-disciplinary approach.

American journalist Gay Talese has also written about *Vogue*, but unlike Hartley's textual analysis of a single issue, Talese actually spent some time on the editorial floor at *Vogue*'s New York office and he spoke to *Vogue* staff. In short he actually did some *real* research:

Each weekday morning a group of suave and wrinkle-proof women, who call one another "dear" and "dahling," move into Manhattan's Graybar Building, elevate to the nineteenth floor, and then slip behind their desks at Vogue – a magazine that has long been the supreme symbol of sophistication for every American female who ever dreamed of being frocked by Balenciaga, shod by Roger Vivier, coiffed by Kenneth, or set free to swing from the Arc de Triomphe in maiden-form mink. (Talese 1986, p.151)

Talese is identified with the American new journalists (circa 1960s-70s) and probably wrote this piece for *Esquire* magazine between 1965 and 1970. My copy of *VOGUEland* comes from a collection of his journalism called *Fame and Obscurity* in which Talese writes that the new journalism is "as reliable as the most reliable reportage although it sees a larger truth" (1986, p.9).

The "larger truth" about *Vogue* is that it is a fashion magazine for women with expensive tastes and deep purses, first last and always⁸⁴. In *Popular Reality* Hartley delivers a six page essay on *Vogue par Nelson Mandela*, a justification for what he calls "postmodern political journalism" (1996, p.128). But at times

⁸⁴ I have throughout this thesis referred to gender in relation to the work of journalists. As Reed notes the major gender division within newswork is between hard news values and soft, or lifestyle, reporting (1998, p.227). The women's pages of newspapers and magazines from *Women's Weekly* to *Vogue* were devised to create and cater to this market.

it's almost as if he's embarrassed by his support for the magazine and its "larger truth", which dents his theoretical suitcase somewhat in that *Vogue par Nelson Mandela*:

marks the aestheticization of radical politics in a magazine read by the crowned (certainly the tiara'd) heads of Europe, not to mention the most upscale readership of all the "glossy" magazines. (Hartley 1996, p.130)

An alternative reading of *Vogue par Nelson Mandela* might be that it depoliticises aesthetics: turns "art" on its head, turns "politics" into advertising. John gets upset that I accuse him of reducing Nelson Mandela to "a fancy brooch on a gaudy low cut sweater" (Hirst 1998b, p.201) in his lavish praise of *Vogue by Nelson Mandela*, but this is exactly what is being celebrated by the magazine. As Hartley himself point out, *Vogue par Nelson Mandela*:

contains 30 pages (plus the back cover), of full-page colour advertising for jewellery; much of it featuring diamonds. There are 18 pages of editorial connected with jewellery, including a four-page publisher's promotion for South African diamonds ([the largest diamond producing conglomerate in the world] De Beers does not advertise in its own name). (Hartley 1996, p.130)

Hartley then goes on to ask a series of rhetorical questions and apologetically answers in the affirmative:

Is this just the normal hype for a pre-Christmas issue? Or is this whole issue of Vogue a bid to keep up demand for De Beers among the diamond buying classes by personalizing and glamorizing the soon-to-be-elected communist-backed ANC government of South Africa? Is this journalism or sponsorship? ...It's all part of couture culture.' (Hartley 1996, p.130)

Of course its sponsorship and of course De Beers doesn't like to use its name publicly, it made billions out of apartheid for many years as an exploiter of black labour in South Africa. The company's association with *Vogue par Nelson Mandela* is an attempt to buy respectability. And do the "diamond buying classes" really give a fuck about black workers? It beggars belief to think they

do. If they can afford to buy De Beers' costly baubles they probably own shares in the company, or at least a dozen like it. In South Africa, their expensive, comfortable and pampered (with black labour) lives are being rocked by the great unwashed masses of South Africa who've finally reclaimed their country (symbolically, but not economically - De Beers is still there and the ANC government has reached a compromise with white capital).

And what are the "tiara'd" ladies who lunch supposed to make of this? Talese concedes that there's occasionally some good writing in *Vogue*, but he reports the comments of a former art director on the magazine, "the inimitable Dr. Mehet Femy Agha, [who] once said":

"Although [features editor] Allene [Talmey] is wonderful, I've often told her she's like a piano player in a whorehouse. She may be a very good piano player, but nobody goes there to hear music. Nobody buys Vogue to read good literature; they buy it to see the clothes."
(Cited in Talese 1986, p.156)

Gay Talese is a journalist, not a cultural theorist, but in what might be a pre-postmodern exercise in "semiotics with funding" he offers some insights into the language of *Vogue* circa 1970:

...the Vogue model is wearing "never-out-of-season black" ...in the words of Vogue's battery of sycophantic caption writers [the models are] "amusable," "exquisite," "delicate," "fun," and "smashing" ...Mrs. Loel Guinness...was described as "vivid, vital, amusing" ...Mrs. Columbus O'Donnel possessed a "quick, amusing sparkle," ...Queen Sirikit of Thailand was "amusable, exquisite," and the Countess of Dalkeith was "ravishing" and as effulgent as Lady Caroline Somerset – herself a "delicate moonbeam beauty." Mrs. Murray Vanderbilt, last year a "slender brunette with direct, heartbreaker eyes, and a soft open laugh," this year is a "beauty with a strong sense of purpose – her purpose being to fly to Paris to have her portrait painted by "jaunty, rakish" Kees Van Dongen, and then fly back to New York the same night, "investing" as Vogue said, "only 23 hours and 45 minutes." (Talese 1986, pp.151-152)

According to Hartley's *own* account this language of fashion was the discourse of *Vogue par Nelson Mandela* and the theme is "not the *logic* of critique but the *beauty* of Nelson Mandela...as much about style (as befits *Vogue*), as about politics" (Hartley 1996, p.128). There's also clear evidence that the *Vogue* editorial team is attempting to appropriate Mandela's image and romanticise (depoliticise?) him:

"From the depths of Africa's immemorial past...Mandela's ancestor king Sabata [is] proof of this illustrious candidate's royal blood. Tribal spirits are summoned forth in protection of their country and their chief."

"'the people' are represented in a superstitious fashion, or, better, in a fashion that encourages superstition." (From *Vogue par Nelson Mandela*, cited in Hartley 1997, p.138)

Even Hartley admits that this is "the racist tribal twist in the *Vogue* copy" (1996, p.138). The ubiquitous fashion spread, "Totem without Taboo" is described in *Popular Reality* as:

...fashion which mixes "north/south" with "east/west" motifs, the new "enfants sauvages" with dreadlocks, a fire-queen outfit with ivory bracelets from Burkina Fasso, and a "soiree in the jungle" with that ultimate image of postmodernity, a photograph of a smell – the perfume on the skin of the model, names as "Tribu" by, naturally, United Colours of Benetton. (Hartley 1996, p.13)

This is what Hartley celebrates as the "democratization of fashion" and "postmodern democracy" as represented by the extremely wealthy supermodel Claudia Schiffer (Hartley 1996, pp.140-141), but clearly it is no more, or less, than the "Democratic snobbery" (Talese 1986, p.158) that has always permeated *Vogue* magazine. Today, the language of *Vogue* is still firmly in this tradition.

Does Vogue offer its readers and 'alternative reading'?

A few years ago, the Australian edition of *Vogue* acquired a new editor, Kristie Clements. In her first "editor's letter" she wrote:

There are key words that seem to crop up every time I'm asked to describe the magazine's direction. Words such as beautiful and

intelligent ... *We have an attitude that is fresh, modern and unique,*
... We kick off [this issue] with a sizzling, sexy bikini story... because
we know you want the fashion news first, we've showcased the first of
the autumn/winter imports... featuring [as a model] Brisbane-born
beauty Alyssa Sutherland... so you can plan next season's look. [The
clothes are] all so gorgeous ... We're committed to bringing you the
best of the best, in fashion, photography, journalism and design.
After all, elitism is nothing to be afraid of - it simply means being the
leader in your field. It's what it takes to be in vogue. (Clements 1999;
 n.p. emphasis added)

The highlighted words confirm Talese's account: the "democratic snobbery" is there in all its finery! The first "journalism" in the November 1999 Australian *Vogue* is a profile, by Francesca Fearon, of shoe designer Manolo Blahnik "the personification of groomed, dandified elegance", with a "lovely name: rich and creamy, it melts on the tongue like delicious pastry". His name is "synonymous with a style of flirty, feminine shoe that is perfectly balanced and exquisitely decorated", a shoe "worn by some of the most glamorous women in the world, including the late Princess of Wales, Madonna, Paloma Picasso, Uma Thurman and Gwyneth Paltrow" (Fearon 1999 pp.20-21). Is it a coincidence that Paltrow is on the cover and featured in a photo-shoot elsewhere in the magazine? It's hard to be sure, but I reckon the Blahnik piece is advertorial, though his shoes are not mentioned on the "where to buy" page alongside the Diego Dolcini crystal slides at \$685 a pair, the Giorgio Armani faux crocodile sandals (\$475); the Sergio Rossi patent sandals (\$555) or the K Jacques thongs at \$285.

The next piece of editorial in November's *Vogue* is "Fashion Chat" by New York-based Robert Sullivan who writes, "everyone on the planet knows that supermodels are totally over". He then goes on, blithely contradicting his lead, "what does this realigned but still beautiful new world mean to the latest hot model...?" We are then introduced to the "latest hot model" and, in the tradition of the "totally over" age of the supermodel, she is 15 years old. A pretty young thing whose look "by the way, is considered wholesome, even pretty, both qualities that are in vogue on the catwalk at the moment". Despite this

“wholesome” newcomer image, with a touch of “foreign exoticism” (she’s Brazilian), the model is highly sexualised:

[She] looks pretty steamy in her promotional photos, which I feel a little Humbert Humbert [of *Lolita* fame] saying, given that she is 15, even though she looks a lot older, like maybe 19. (Sullivan 1999, p.26, emphasis added)

Yeah Mr Sullivan, in fashion modelling, four years is a lifetime! There’s a photo of Isabeli (first name only ‘*dahling*’) in a dress by Valentino that’s split to the waist (lots of leg, thigh and hip showing) and clinging to her bra-less frame. Superimposed over another illustration (a cropped shot of Isabeli in a Ralph Lauren ad that probably appeared in a previous issue) *Vogue*’s sycophantic caption writers have posed the question: “Does she herald the return of the supermodel?” There’s not a touch of irony in this from the *Vogue* staffers concerned, or maybe they don’t read the copy.

‘Freedom’ - style tips for the rich and vacuous

On page 30 *Vogue*’s readers are offered “freedom of choice”. This turns out to be an option to choose any one of six featured hats by famous designers, all of which appear to be unwearable, including one that looks like a metal kitchen colander that’s been bent out of shape to cover the face of the wearer like medieval chain-mail. Ironically the headline on this short piece (300 words) by “fashion news director” Kirsty Munro is “This is not a hat” (Munro 1999a, p.30), just in case we thought that’s what we were actually looking at in the pictures.

The fashion section of the magazine is entirely predictable, a mix of product placement and tips, as in “the secrets of style”, where “four leading fashion figures open their wardrobe doors on essential summer chic” (Munro 1999b, pp.42, 44, 46 & 48).

Under the heading “beauty”⁸⁵ there’s a two page advertorial featuring the latest fragrances from the leading fashion houses that plays on the supposed “insecurity” that “we” - *Vogue*’s stylish female readers and staffers - feel when

⁸⁵ In case you are wondering this is not a typo, the *Vogue* sub-editors are big on lower case headlines.

“faced with a new millennium”. This typically female anxiety can, of course, be calmed with any one of the featured scents - though not with that ultimate postmodern accessory, a *photograph* of a scent. Anxiety “breeds a desire for more closeness. And this desire has a smell” (*Vogue Australia*, November 1999, pp.58 & 60). The full-page ad opposite page 60 is for Shiseido’s new parfum, *vocalise*.

The real ‘news’ of *Vogue* begins on page 74 with a short profile of Australian actress Sarah Wynter. This is followed by “foxy ladies”: “a girl’s guide to the Fox studios – from make-up and jewellery, to a tour of frocks and schlock” (Colbert 1999a, pp.77-78). Of course there’s a marketing angle to go with the *virtual* “tour”:

No girl’s guide to Fox Studios is complete without a sneak preview of the Fox Shop. In this superbly-designed minimalist haven, merchandising manager Kathryn Anderson (ex David Jones) and her team have developed eight ranges of 1,500 new products inspired by Fox television and film hits. (Colbert 1999b, p.78)

By the way, Fox studios in Sydney opened to the public on November 8, 1999. *Coincidence?* There’s more in this vein: a brief “what’s on” guide and a promotional feature for a book of photographs by “longtime *Vogue* contributor, photographer Greg Barrett”.

Art for art’s sake?

Then on page 87 what at first glance seems to be a serious story: “Paradise found” by Kim Langley, about the art of Aboriginal women from the settlement of Utopia in “Central Australia” (wherever that is). But hang on, it’s actually about the collection of indigenous art owned by Australia’s richest female republican figure head and fashion plate, Janet Holmes a Court. The lead is a dead give-away:

Rich people often own major works of art. Like haute couture, private jets and multiple homes, it tends to go with the millions...According to Holmes a Court, sharing her enthusiasm [for indigenous art] with the public “is one of the great luxuries of owning a private collection”. (Langley 1999, p.87)

What do you make of that professor “Semiotician-with-a-keen-interest-in-indigenous-issues”? Let me guess. You’re going to tell us the Janet is one of the new breed of postmodern, democratic squillionaires who needs to get in touch with her humanity by making her valuable collection available to the plebeians and that this somehow enriches and benefits the women of the sadly named Utopia settlement somewhere in ‘Central Australia’. *Bullshit! This just makes me mad.* Allow me to offer an alternative reading of this piece. These nameless ‘female residents’ of Utopia - the late Emily Kame Kngwarreye rates a mention as the “most famous” - are marginalised, romanticised and hidden from view in this story. This story ultimately naturalises the wealth of Janet Holmes a Court, makes her appear saint-like and restricts the Aboriginal artists to the invisible other. *There you go, I can do textual analysis too.*

Bad girls are gorgeous too

On page 88 we meet the “mysterious Mrs Murdoch”, Wendi Deng in a profile by Matt Seaton. We learn that Ms Deng/Mrs Murdoch was born in Shandong, China, the daughter of a “politically well-connected” “factory manager” and that she’s “certainly an attractive proposition” for a man of Murdoch’s wealth and taste. She’s described as “strikingly tall - close to 180 centimetres - and good-looking if not gorgeous”, a woman who made “a rapid ascent of the corporate ladder” (Seaton 1999, p.90). We can concede that this is journalism *Vogue*-style, but it’s pretty meaningless, gossip not news. I am reminded when reading this, of a passage in *Bad Girls: the media, sex & feminism in the 90s* (Lumby1997) in which the author outlines a “Marxist-feminist credo”:

...that social and economic conditions have forced women to turn themselves into objects of vision for men. Men look at women, the argument goes, and women learn to see themselves through the eyes of men...[this] determines more than relations between men and women-it determines the way women relate to themselves. (Lumby 1997, p.80)

Catharine Lumby, as we might expect, then goes on to discredit this thesis:

Despite persistent claims on the part of some feminists that the media continues to oppress women and ignore feminist views, the opposite

is demonstrably true...The current problem for feminism is not oppressive patriarchal misrepresentation of women, but how to maintain a sense of identity in the face of a flood of competing images of feminism itself. (Lumby 1997, p.93)

In the spirit of postmodern journalism Lumby defends contemporary magazines aimed at a female readership as symbols of an “attempt to market female assertiveness” (1997, p.83) and as evidence of the “overwhelming democratisation of our media”:

...a diversification not only of voices, but of ways of speaking about personal, social and political life. (Lumby 1999, p.xiii)

However, I can only surmise from the *Vogue* copy cited above, that in Lumby’s postmodern utopia it’s okay for women (and men) to objectify women for the sake of fashion and the delight of reading about impossibly rich and out-of-reach women like Wendi Deng whose experience of life might match those of *Vogue* cognoscenti, but are totally removed from the lives of the general magazine buying public.

Vogue has a serious side too, at \$100 a copy

After the ‘sizzling’ bikini splash and a sneak preview of the new autumn/winter collections we get the headline feature in the November 1999 issue of *Vogue Australia*: an abridged essay by Susan Sontag and a handful photographs by Annie Leibovitz that “encapsulate the diversity that is women today” (Sontag 1999, p.119). Here we go, at last some really good writing and evocative photographs. Perhaps this will exonerate Catharine Lumby and help prove her point. *Let’s take a look.*

Sontag’s essay is disappointingly brief, between 900 and 1000 words, but it makes the point that the photographs both “confirm” and “challenge” the stereotypes of “what women are like” (1999, p.119). The words in *Vogue* are taken from a book by Sontag & Leibovitz called *Women* that retails for \$100. They write that their work “however much it attends to women’s activeness, is also about women’s attractiveness”, in a way that a similar book about men would not be (Sontag 1999, p.120). The extract from Sontag’s essay is “feminist” in its way and ends with a challenge to readers:

A book of photographs; a book about women: generous, ardent, inventive, open-ended. It's for us to decide what to make of these pictures. (Sontag 1999, p.120)

The pictures chosen (presumably chosen by *Vogue* staff) will not cause much discomfort to the readers of *Vogue*. It is more likely that they will be read as an affirmation of the lifestyle these celebrity women enjoy and that 'ordinary' *Vogue* readers might aspire to:

- ?? Jerry Hall, in a fur coat, son Gabriel sucking on her partially exposed breast;
- ?? tennis playing sisters Venus and Serena Williams, looking strong and confident;
- ?? a grainy shot of two young girls playing with Barbie dolls (the only non-celebrity subjects in this group);
- ?? a serious-looking Hilary Rhodium Clinton on a White House porch;
- ?? a multiple exposure shot of New York artist Cindy Sherman;
- ?? three society ladies from Houston, Texas, lunching at Tony's restaurant; and
- ?? New York sculptor Louise Bourgeois.

Vogue girls shop till they have to pay

Cover-girl Gwyneth Paltrow is the subject of the next story by Andre Leon Talley:

She has played roles that span the centuries but on a day out shopping with Andre Leon Talley, Gwyneth Paltrow proves to be a very contemporary woman with modern interests – fashion, fashion and fashion. (Talley 1999, p.133)

And shopping is exactly what Paltrow and Talley do, name-dropping all the *Vogueite*'s favoured brands along the way (Gucci, Calvin Klien, Louis Vuitton, Prada, etc.). Even the Manolo Blahnik shoes get another mention, but still no price information (they might be too pricey even for the normally loaded *Vogue* ladies). This piece is classic *Vogue*, complete with the self-referential pitch:

"This is the most fun day ever, ever, ever," she proclaims as we head up Madison Avenue to the Calvin Klein store. "That's what happens

when you get Vogue-ised” I tell her. “Can I get a job at Vogue?” she asks, jokingly.’ (Talley 1999, p.138)

Then there are the obligatory *Vogue*jectives, fashion designers are asked to comment on Gwyneth’s ‘look’:

[Tom Ford says] *“I love Gwyneth. A year ago I would have said she was a modern version of Grace Kelly...Now that I know her I realise that she is incredibly intelligent, funny and smart.”...Calvin Klien agrees: “Gwyneth knows who she is. She’s authentic and it shows in her sense of style. Real glamour is about having the confidence to keep it simple.” (Cited in Talley 1999, p.134)*

Of course, glamour is simple when you can afford to buy it from some of the most expensive stores on the planet and spend thousands of dollars without even blinking. It is even more affordable if the items you select are paid for by the magazine, or given free in return for the attendant publicity in *Vogue*. This really is “democratic snobbery” in action.

*The pose behind the glamour
...behind the masthead*

In “VOGUEland” Gay Talese quotes from a 1960s sociological study of women’s magazines reported in the journal *Social Forces*: where, according to Talese:

...it was stated that while the symbols of prestige in Vogue were “sophistication and chic,” these same symbols were scorned by the respectable PTA-types of the Ladies’ Home Journal, where there “is a distaste for the ‘high style,’ for what is ‘daring or ‘unusual.’” (Talese 1986, p.158)

The *Social Forces* article quoted by Talese suggests that the *Vogue* readers are really more interested in social climbing, than in sharing the fate of the ‘PTA-types’ who buy the magazine:

“In the social class just below the ‘old money’ families we find most of the ‘high fashion,’ Paris-conscious style leaders. Since they are aware of the class above, perhaps trying to gain entrance into it, these women seek to combine opulence with ‘quiet elegance.’

‘Fashion copy’ for this group stresses the pose of assured distinction, effortless superiority, and inbred elegance.” (Barber and Lobel cited in Talese 1986, p.159)

Vogue – home away from home

There’s more, of course, including blatant advertorial featuring the newest hotel in the Balazs chain, the Standard on Sunset Boulevard in West Hollywood (Langley 1999, p.140, 143). Like many of the reportage in *Vogue Australia*, this is obviously a syndicated piece, the hotel’s in California. The luxurious lobby is full, “even at 9am” with “impossibly groovy twentysomethings - girls with pierced bits and pieces sporting bikinis and board shorts, tattooed boys in cargo pants with their underwear showing,” (Calvin Klein maybe?). The gushing copy even extols the “cheap” prices, “from \$95 for a budget room to \$200 for an ‘x-large’ – it’s groovy, it’s fun, it’s hotel as performance art” (Langley 1999, p.143).

Vogue – don’t put to sea without it

Towards the back of the magazine, some Australian content, but not too much - just a few bits of advertorial and some gossip photos including a spread on the *Vogue* party to celebrate 40 years of publishing in Australia. The next piece is about an Italian yacht and crew entered in the America’s Cup (P. Reed 1999), but there’s the inevitable a fashion/product tie-in. None other than fashion ‘godmother’ Miuccia Prada leads the team. Like the copy on the expensive hotel and the fashion accessories that litter the magazine, this piece is suitably peppered with *Vogue*jectives. The sight of cruising yachts is “wonderfully glamorous and romantic”; the yacht has “minimalist elegance”. The reporter reveals that Miuccia Prada is reluctant to let the models and photographers, assembled for the “fashion shoot”, anywhere near the boats; but she relents when reporter Paula Reed offers a justification:

sport is fashion these days; the technology developed for competition has informed the development of hi-tech fabrics and design that make the best contemporary fashion so desirable. (Reed 1999, p.160)

And the most “desirable” fashion in this setting? Why, Prada “*dahling*”, naturally!

It's all terribly 'zhuzhi'

Before we end our *vogueing* with the professor, let's take a quick peak into home of "leading Australian swimwear designer Jodie Boffa" and her "advertising executive" husband Matthew McGrath, "in the exquisite surrounds of Palm Beach on Sydney's northern beaches" (Pow 1999, p.163). No need for details, but trust me there's plenty of the brand name-dropping and one really good *Voguejective* we haven't come across yet: "zhuzhi", as in "[the house] looked very big and sort of 'zhuzhi', but it had really good bones'" (Jodie Boffa quoted in Pow 1999, p.164). What does it mean? Your guess is as good as mine, but it's *soooooooh* nineties.

So what can we say about *Vogue*? I looked, but found little evidence of Hartley's 'aestheticization of politics', though maybe the Sontag piece fits the bill. Is it postmodern journalism? Personally I don't think such a thing exists, but perhaps it fits John's definition: it's "*non-violent*" and maybe it's "feminized, juvenated, sexualized, suburban, domestic, private and commercial" (Hartley 1999, p.231). Yep, it's definitely commercial. Is it liberating? Not in my opinion, but I do find myself in rare agreement with John Hartley's assessment that it is a type of modern journalism that:

...functions to produce social knowledge and cultural values...contributing to the process whereby people's submission to the "prevailing climate" - including the continuity within this climate of class inequality - is secured.' (Hartley 1982, p.56, emphasis added)

Perhaps the *Vogue*-ettes are grey collar after all. *No, just kidding*. That aside, Hartley's recognition of class inequality - even if it is from an earlier and less postmodern period of his life - provides a neat segue into a discussion of class and Hartley's claim that journalism is "a violent profession" (1999, p.232). This is a thread to the debate that journalism educators and working journalists might feel it necessary to respond to. I know I do.

The brave new world of Hartleyspeak

Newspeak was the official language of Oceania and had been devised to meet the ideological needs of Ingsoc, or English Socialism...The

purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible... This was done partly by the invention of new words, but chiefly by eliminating undesirable words and by stripping such words as remained of unorthodox meanings, and so far as possible of all secondary meanings whatever. (Orwell 1988, p.237)

...for the realist-modernist journalism educator, journalism is a violent profession, truth is violence; reality is war. (Hartley 1999, p.231)

And war is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength (Orwell 1988, p.7). The similarity between Orwell's principles of *Newspeak*, *news speak*, and Hartley's aphoristic take on modern journalism is funnily frightening.

Conflict over conflicting interpretations of 'conflict'

In *Why is it Scholarship When Someone Wants to Kill You?* (Hartley 1999), the author takes issue with Murray Masterton's chapter in Breen (Masterton 1998, pp.85-103) that attempts to theorise the widespread acceptance and reproduction of the traditional values of news speak. These news values are the language of the emotional dialectic of modernism that informs journalistic practice. The chapter is based on Masterton's doctoral research and highlights the necessary elements that make information newsworthy - the core news values must be present; the presence and number of news values exhibited determine the level of newsworthiness and that news values are essentially universal in their application (Masterton 1998, p.87). The six key news values identified by Masterton's research, in order of importance are:

1. Consequence (importance and impact of the story on the audience)
2. Proximity (how close the story comes to the lives of the readers/viewers)
3. Conflict (disagreement over facts, opinions or issues)
4. Human Interest (stories about people)
5. Novelty (the unusual, the rare or the bizarre)

6. Prominence (stories about prominent people) (Masterton 1998, p.91)

This really is bread and butter stuff for most newswriters and journalism educators. One might have expected, given John Hartley's claimed expertise in 'textual analysis' and professional interest in journalism, that he too would accept this as uncontroversial. However, in an Orwellian twist, Hartley felt it necessary to highlight the third news value on this list - Conflict. He then devotes nearly two pages to concocting a 'theory' that somehow this makes journalism a "violent profession" and "an explanation of why the language of violence and killing is deemed acceptable scholarship in journalism education" (Hartley 1999, p.232). In fact, if we examine Masterton's data we see that there's only a handful of 'votes' in the decision to rank the list in the order chosen. According to Masterton's 'old-fashioned' empirical methods the coding of the top six news values proceeded as follows:

News Value	Total points	Level of acceptance
Consequence	467	1.75
Proximity	381	1.42
Conflict	380	1.42
Human Interest	373	1.41
Novelty	360	1.34
Prominence	335	1.26

Table drawn from Masterton 1998, p.91

One can only wonder at the delight Hartley might have expressed had the listed positions of 'Conflict' and 'Proximity' been reversed. As it is Hartley thinks he's found some ammunition in the fact that Australian respondents to the Masterton survey placed 'Conflict' at the top of their lists. What Hartley doesn't mention is that in the context of international responses to Masterton's survey, 'Conflict' was placed in every position within the top six (Masterton 1998, pp.95-96). It is hard to draw too many certainties from this - but Hartley does - except by ill-tempered references to the Newspeak dictionary of rendered meanings:

Violence is truth; reality is war. It follows that from this perspective,

the defence of truth-one of Keith Windschuttle's principle aims- requires the defence of violence. (Hartley 1999, p.232)

Contrast this to Murray Masterton's quite logical and less sweeping conclusions:

Paradoxes are obvious in accepting Conflict as a news criterion. Third World critics claim it is a peculiarly Western attitude to news and that they prefer consensus to conflict, yet Conflict ranks first in the Middle East region, and second in Europe and South Asia, but only fifth in North America, arch-example of 'Western' journalism. The figures suggest Conflict is a news criterion of Europe and thus of countries colonised by Europe, but apart from Australia and India the results seem to prove otherwise. Africa and the Pacific regions, areas of European colonial activity, rank Conflict fifth and sixth respectively-all except Australia, which rates it higher than anywhere except the Middle East. (Masterton 1998, p.96)

This reads like one of Schudson's "culturological" interpretations of the data, one which Hartley would argue is beyond a *mere* journalism scholar who shuns the assistance of self-validating media theorists. What it's really telling us is that the emotional logic that dictates which news values are given prominence varies from place to place, from newsroom to newsroom. But Hartley is not content with obscuring Masterton's mild-mannered conclusions, he also draws a six word phrase out of a sentence, thereby "stripping" away "so far as possible", "all secondary meanings whatever" (Orwell 1988, p.237). Masterton provides the definition of Conflict that appeared in his survey questionnaire, which Hartley also quotes in full:

[Conflict is] ...any form of conflict, not just the physical violence associated with war. It includes any difference of opinion, including physical (war, sport), legal (court cases, crime), intellectual or psychological (protest groups or individuals expressing their contrary views on any subject). (Masterton 1988, p.96; cited in Hartley 1999, p.232)

This is a suitably broad definition, one that is in use in journalism courses around the world and one that does not privilege war or other forms of physical violence.

Yet in Hartley's hands it is reduced to the following disembodied (and misleading) phrase:

...Conflict is the highest criterion for news in Australia, and if it is understood as an extension of the 'physical violence associated with war'... (Hartley 1999, p.232)

Nowhere in Masterton's chapter does the evidence present itself for reading of the news value of Conflict is an *extension* of violence associated with war. Masterton is actually careful to render the exact opposite meaning; it is *any* form of conflict, *not just that associated with wars*.

The other elision in Hartley's rendition of Masterton is the valid point that Human Interest, Novelty and Prominence all rate in the top six internationally recognised news values. I thought Hartley might have been enthusiastic about this and sought to highlight that it supports his claims for the emergence of postmodern journalism and its fetishism of sexualised celebrity, entertainment gossip and the foibles of domestic suburbia. In *Popular Reality* it is precisely these elements that signify, for Hartley a 'postmodern' journalism. They are given priority over the public interest functions of the media (see Hartley 1996, particularly Chapter 7, *The frock of the new*). In this cultural studies perspective Masterton's news values are out of date, relegated to the time capsule of a rapidly disappearing modernist genre (news reporting):

I've argued that the classical public domain is fully fictionalized and rhetoricized in contemporary representative politics, and that the 'smiling professions' [advertising, public relations and entertainment] exist within the great institutions of government, education and the media to produce and circularize Sahlinesque symbols that allow society to cohere at all (to the extent that it does cohere at all. Suburbia is just as fictional as the classical public domain. (Hartley 1996, p.189)

To complete the picture it is important to dwell for a moment on the "Sahlinesque". Hartley quotes approvingly from and paraphrases Marshall Sahlins:

Sahlins suggests that 'a logic completely foreign to the conventional

“rationality” is present in economic and social life’, a ‘practical reason’ that pervades humanity. But far from being a mere epiphenomenon of more basic matters like the economy (material goods) and class (social relations), Sahlins argues that it is the cultural system of meanings based on appearance and the glance which enables the other components of ‘civilization’ to operate at all - the economy, modern, rational, productive and impersonal, is nevertheless ‘totemic’ in anthropological terms. (Hartley 1996, p.182, emphasis added)

There’s a footnote (24): “Sahlins argues for an anthropology of meaning in which culture is understood both as a unified symbolic structure, and as a form of practical reasoning with material effects” (Hartley 1996, p.193). Here the idealism of the cultural-determinist position stands clearly before us in the words I’ve underlined. Hartley’s postmodernism completes the 20 year journey begun by Raymond Williams to deny the existence of determination of the superstructure (epiphenomenon) by the material forces of production (the base). What we end up with, in order to justify unsustainable claims for a postmodern journalism is a ‘turning on its head’ of the emotional dialectic of the front-page as I’ve argued it throughout the grey collar thesis. The emotional dialectic of postmodern journalism does not rely on the prevailing relations of production and thus, ultimately, the economic Base for determination. It floats in the ‘appearance’ and the ‘glance’, free of restricting rules dictated by the dual nature of the news commodity.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated the logic of my grey collar thesis through a careful reading and critique of the claims by cultural theorists for the existence of postmodern journalism. In this and the chapter on Raymond Williams I have shown that such claims rest on a shaky foundation of both technological and cultural determinism, while professing to discredit the implied economic determinism of the materialist methods of Marxism. I have also outlined a number of theoretical positions within journalism education and scholarship and alluded to the spaces where my grey collar thesis might find a niche.

I have also shown how journalism education is *both* training exercises in vocational and professional praxis and the transmission of a complex paradigm for understanding newswork as a set of cultural, social and political activities. The grey collar thesis explains why this is necessary - it is the training of intellectual labour for an active working life. This involves a set of practical skills (newsgathering and newswriting); the socialisation of young reporters into a news culture and instilling a necessary self-reflexivity into those who would embark on an important career at the heart of public life.

While I have been super-critical of the evidence presented for postmodern journalism, I have also indicated that there is much in media and cultural studies that I find useful. The final chapter pulls this material together in a discussion of how journalism is changing in response to the social pressures enumerated in the grey collar thesis and of how journalism scholars might respond to this in their teaching and scholarly practices.

Chapter 9

Grey collar intellectuals: Thinking writers, or cogs in a machine?

Art is a distinct form of the labour process in which -- amid the myriad effusions and narcotic productions of class culture - is kept alive and materialised the imagery of man's hope and of that very same human essence which Marxism seeks to reveal. (Solomon 1979, p.20)

The work I've done in this thesis, on postmodernism and the Marxist model of Base and Superstructure, has led me to read some early works by Marxists on the relationship between 'art' and 'work'; 'class' and 'culture'; 'economics' and 'aesthetics'. Other chapters have argued these issues in detail, but the quote above, from *Marxism and Art* (Solomon 1979) encapsulates my current thinking on this matter:

Art is work

The work of the artist, or in fact any producer of cultural artefacts - among whom I include journalists and the news media - is in every instance a process of expending human labour and transforming nature via the use of tools. It is 'work' and it occurs within a confining set of economic and social circumstances. However, there is a sense in which, unlike the alienated labour of a factory or office worker, the work of an artist connects with the hopes, aspirations, fears and dreams of humanity. Thus it 'talks' to the rest of society about the human condition. This is what I have expressed as the duality of the news commodity and why the grey collar thesis places so much emphasis on understanding the limits imposed on the emotional dialectic by the relations of production. The creative role that journalism plays in the formation and reproduction of national

consciousness – the ideologies and emotional dialectics of an epoch – leads to political tensions in their production relations and within the commodities they produce. For the grey collar journalist a creation (news artefact) may contain an attitude “inimical to the interests of a society”, but at the same time “brings about the changes in social conditions which lead people to retrospectively appreciate the role of this creator” (Krause 1971, p.278). I have demonstrated in previous chapters that the conditions under which editorial newswriters labour create a split or fractured consciousness (the emotional dialectic). My thesis is supported by the work of Krause who argues that creative labour places the labourers themselves in “an exposed position with respect to the power of the public and the governing elite of society” (1971, p.278). Finally, I agree with Krause that creative workers are involved politically, either consciously or unconsciously:

Historically, in terms of career experience and division of labour, as well as in terms of who benefits by their work, the creative worker and the creations of that worker are both deeply political. (Krause 1971, p.278)

The News Commodity and the Grey Collar Labour Process

It is my contention that journalism can be positioned somewhere in between, and shares many characteristics of, both the assembly line and artistic endeavour. Hence, neither the white collar of the professional, nor the blue collar of wharfies, but grey collared journalists.

The grey collar journalist thesis has argued that the function of news *as* a commodity (ie to make advertising space attractive to those who can use it) implies that the social relations of news production also take on this commodity form. That is they are *determined* (limited and pressured) by the relations of production. In this sense the majority of journalists are waged or salaried workers, and their labour realises surplus value for the shareholders of that chunk of Capital⁸⁶ (the television network, or newspaper baron).

⁸⁶ The question of whether or not media capital is productive or unproductive is tackled in Chapter 3: *Hard Yakka*.

The myth of postmodern journalism

My thesis has also been a critique of the postmodernist analysis of journalism and Hartley's suggestion that journalism itself has become "postmodern" (Hartley 1996, p.127). I've argued in this thesis and elsewhere (Guerke & Hirst 1996; Hirst 1998a, 1998b, 1998c) that it's no coincidence that Cultural Studies appears prominently in John Hartley's theorisation ("textualization") of journalism. To suggest, as he does in *Popular Reality*, that one 1994 edition of French *Vogue* edited by Nelson Mandela, constitutes a new form of "Postmodern political journalism" (1996, p.127) is patently ridiculous as I demonstrated in chapter 9. Also to suggest, as Hartley does, that a random collection of stories about Kylie Minogue and Sophie Lee constitutes a highly personalised and sexualised new form of journalism, speaking directly to the "quintessentially Australian 'class' which lives in 'the' suburbs, the petit bourgeoisie," (1996, p.188), is highly debatable.

If they're not residing in "the" suburbs, where does Hartley think that other "quintessentially Australian" class, the proletariat, has gone? Do Melbourne wharfies, as former and notorious Industrial Relations Minister Peter Reith would have us believe, really live in glamorous and expensive inner-city apartments? Do 'ordinary' workers mix with the 'glitterati' in the 'high roller' room of Star City casino? No, they die ugly deaths on the footpath outside⁸⁷.

Apart from being fundamentally wrong about the true nature of class and class struggle in Australia, Hartley's *Popular Reality* makes only passing reference to media industries and no mention at all of what journalists actually do, or how their work is constituted. On the other hand grey collar journalism is a thesis in the field broad of media sociology and is concerned newswork as a labour process.

You are what you do

Like almost everyone in a capitalist society, journalists are defined by what they do, labour is "central to our sense of social identity" as well as the basis of

⁸⁷ A Sydney man died after Casino bouncers tackled him to the ground and grappled with him one evening outside Sydney's legal casino. His family claimed he was murdered.

“human existence” (Willis 1988, p.1). I have shown that labour process theory examines work as a “social activity insofar as it entails an employment relationship” and recognises that work is not “static”, but undergoes “constant change” (Willis 1988, p.1). Labour process theory is, for Willis, a materialist sociology of work and he recognises the importance of situating any study within the concrete limits of the social formation under consideration. Thus his work recognises the “relationship of domination and subordination” that exists in a capitalist society (Willis 1988, p.4).

From my point of view this is an important consideration, Willis acknowledges the existence of class divisions and the importance of Braverman’s degradation thesis. He also accepts the notion of a ‘new’ professionalised middle class, which is “important at the level of maintaining capitalist social order,” and acts “as organic intellectuals to the dominant class” (Willis 1988, p.4). In chapter 3 I examined this idea against what I am calling the ‘labour theory of journalism’. In short my argument challenged traditional labour process theory in that I believe grey collar journalists are objectively wage-earners and therefore *economically* members of the working class, but *ideologically* (in terms of their class *consciousness*) newswriters are attached to what some call the ‘new middle class’ (Daly & Willis 1988; Callinicos 1989b). The defining link in this ‘dual’ natured group of workers is the ideology of professionalism⁸⁸.

Professionalism an ideological mask

It is this ideology that masks and confuses the journalist regarding his/her role as a public intellectual and prevents them from developing a true class-consciousness of themselves as workers. Instead newswriters constantly fall back on the myth of objectivity as discussed in chapter 7. So, the ‘line’ that they articulate tends to vacillate between the emotional dialectic of opposition (Hallin’s sphere of deviance) and that of conformity (the sphere of consensus). I have demonstrated that at times, such as the constitutional crisis of 1975, during elections and during important public debates about political issues (the republic convention of 1998) the ideological ambivalence of grey collar journalists is manifest.

Thinking writers, or cogs in a machine?

We are living in the information age and writing is at the heart of the dissemination of information. No matter what the delivery mechanism is; the Internet, multimedia, print journalism, broadcast journalism, literature and so on, writing is the fundamental element in the information revolution that we find ourselves within. Converging production and delivery technologies are blurring the line between 'print' and 'broadcast' media. The impact of this on the work of journalists is only beginning to be felt. The ironic and self-deprecating joke among reporters is that they are no longer journalists, but merely 'content providers'. As eminent journalist and former editor, Paul Kelly puts it; "people don't have as much time for content as they used to have":

We need to be very careful about the battle between content and finance, and we need to be very careful about changing values. If journalists are just content providers, there are many consequences.

(Cited in O'Regan 2001a, p.6)

Wither intellectual journalism?

Paul Kelly was not always on the winning side when he championed solid, intellectual journalism at *The Australian*. When Lachlan Murdoch arrived in Australia to manage his father's newspaper business, one of his first decisions was to sack Paul Kelly as editor-in-chief in a bid to attract younger readers, increase circulation and take a "lighter, brighter approach" to news reporting (Dalley 1998). Kelly himself is philosophical about his removal and continues to have a prominent role as the paper's senior political and foreign affairs writer:

When I left [the editor's chair] Lachlan congratulated me for the job I'd done, but it is fair to say that Lachlan did want to put his stamp on the company and, if it has been made, to make the paper more accessible to young readers. I don't think there's any doubt about that. (Cited in Dalley 1998, n.p.)

This draws attention to the contradiction that is at the heart of this thesis: the impact of technology and the social relations of news production on the way

⁸⁸ See Chapter 3: *Hard Yakka* and Chapter 7: *Profitability and Public Interest*.

journalism *as a labour process* is organised. On the one hand, these changes are creating a vast layer of process workers who do the ‘grunt’ work in the newsroom (general reporters and sub-editors). On the other hand, there is an emerging elite of highly paid commentators/columnists in most, if not all, news media. In the middle is a vast layer of newswriters who are socially aware, vaguely left wing and prepared to question the status quo. I argue throughout this thesis that the social relations of news production create the conditions in which grey collar journalism thrives, even if the reporters and editors themselves do not acknowledge, or even recognise their situation.

Perhaps journalists are becoming redundant; though it may be more accurate to say that they’re being replaced by ‘content providers’ as traditional media outlets vie for market-share and profitability in Cyberspace. The grey collar newswriter of the (near) future might be even more slavishly tied to a computer terminal (or to have one implanted!):

Questions about the media are posed with great intensity against the backdrop of the new technologies, and ironically, decreasing money being spent on the people who create the content. (Garrett 1999, p.1)

Senior reporter with the *Australian Financial Review*, Pamela Williams believes newsroom resources are being redirected towards Internet sites that are “chomping through [them] with an insatiable appetite...to create extra staff for newspapers on the web” (1999, p.2). The “computer-driven globalisation of information” (Oakes 1999, p.6) throughout the late 1990s threatened the very future of journalism. It seemed that, simultaneously, everyone was a journalist and no one was a journalist. It is in this context that my argument about grey collar newswriters finds a home: Are reporters literary intellectuals or expendable hired hands?

George Orwell: the epitome of grey collar shabbiness

I want to conclude this thesis close to its starting point, with George Orwell. Why is George Orwell *sine qua non* of grey collar journalists? In simple terms because he represented in its clearest form the emotional attitudes of a grey collar, class-

conscious intellectual of his time. Eric Blair⁸⁹ was the product of a lower middle class English background - he was born in India, the son of a minor colonial official, but in 1917 he was sent up to Eton:

I was born into what you might describe as the lower-upper-middle class...the layer of society earning between £2000 and £3000 a year: my own family was not far from the bottom. (Orwell 1975, p.106)

Even so, as he grew older, Orwell fervently supported left wing causes and politics. Orwell served with the Indian Imperial Police force in Burma from 1922 to 1927. His successful first novel *Burmese Days* (1934⁹⁰) covers this period and recounts the harsh experiences that began to shape his class-consciousness. On his return to England, Orwell was impoverished and spent some time living as a tramp. The two long-form essays, *Down and out in Paris and London* (1933) and *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), are journalistic accounts of the lives of ordinary working class folk whom Orwell met on his meander through the depression years. By the age of 30, Orwell was not ashamed to call himself a socialist. His experience of the Spanish Civil War - *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) - further shaped his life and deepened his commitment to left wing causes:

Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic Socialism as I understand it. (Orwell 1984a, p.11)

Orwell was never a wealthy man. He worked at the BBC's Indian service from 1941 to 1943 and from the end of the war until his death in 1950 earned a living as a journalist-writer. He was literary editor of the *Tribune* and also wrote for the *Observer* and the *Manchester Guardian*. His last fiction works - *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949) are perhaps his best known, though the

⁸⁹ Orwell's authorised biographer, Peter Shelden writes that it "would have been a little easier" if Eric Blair had written under his own name, not the pseudonym George Orwell. However, Shelden uses both names in his book in an attempt to maintain a distinction between Blair's real existence and his life as the writer-intellectual George Orwell from about the age of 30 (Shelden 1992, n.p.).

⁹⁰ Shelden's biography confirms these details. In the References I have only noted books directly referred to or quoted from. Most of Orwell's books are commonly available and still in print.

heritage of these works is disputed. There are those who see them as Orwell's renunciation of socialism, others regard them as fine allegorical and political satires on his own age and post-war Britain. I am firmly of the latter view.

George Orwell is a grey collar journalist-intellectual because of his strong sense of himself as both a public intellectual and as a socialist as he understood it. In other words he was what Antonio Gramsci has famously called an 'organic' intellectual, with an emotional attitude allied to the cause of the working classes (Harris 1992; Holub 1992; Louw 2001). George Orwell was a product of his time and it was these social conditions that pushed him towards a socialist outlook on life:

In a peaceful age I might have written ornate or merely descriptive books, and might have remained almost unaware of my political loyalties...As it is I have been forced into becoming a sort of pamphleteer...I spent five years in an unsuitable profession...and then I underwent poverty and a sense of failure. This increased my natural hatred of authority and made me for the first time fully aware of the existence of the working classes, and...the nature of imperialism...Then came Hitler, the Spanish Civil War, etc. (Orwell 1984a, p.10)

In Spain Orwell was wounded fighting alongside the Republicans and wrote articles for the left-leaning magazine *New Statesman* (Shelden 1992, pp.303-305). It was in Spain that Orwell's dictum: "Socialism as I understand it" got him into trouble with the editors at *New Statesman*. They didn't like the fact that he submitted a book review that contravened the magazine's editorial policy on the war - he wrote that the Communist influence in Barcelona was damaging the Republican cause (Shelden 1992, p.305). We've known now for years that he was right: the Stalinist line of the Spanish communists meant they were busy shooting Trotskyists and Orwell's Marxist friends in the POUM on orders from Moscow. (See *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell 1989).

The unglamorous Orwell

Eric Blair was a grey collar journalist for another important reason-an economic one. Blair/Orwell worked as a newspaper and radio journalist. He also spent

some time as a propagandist at the BBC during World War Two. But many of his years at the BBC were spent in what Sheldon describes as a “dismal story of office drudgery” (1992, p.373). Orwell’s job was to write pleading letters to leading British intellectuals seeking their contributions to radio broadcasts, an “enormous waste” of Orwell’s talents (Sheldon 1992, p.373). In this too, Eric Blair proved his grey collar credentials - not every job in journalism is glamorous.

Truth is stranger than Orwell's fiction

I have always loved George Orwell’s fiction. His wonderful novel of a futuristic dystopia, *Nineteen Eighty-four* (Orwell 1988) was among the first ‘adult’ books I read as a young teenager. In *Nineteen Eighty-four* the sexual tension between Winston and Julia is hauntingly beautiful, romantic and tragic. The doctrines of the underground leader Emmanuel Goldstein (Leon Trotsky?) are inspiring. It is fate I suppose that led me to use Orwell in this thesis, as a paradigm example of the class-conscious grey collar newsworker and intellectual. He is also an important bell-weather for the other protagonists mentioned in these pages.

But for now let me introduce Orwell in the guise of Emmanuel Goldstein, Big Brother’s oppositional doppelganger in *Nineteen Eighty-four*. Goldstein’s views prefigure the class-based analyses of newswork that inform the grey collar thesis. The following passage is taken from Goldstein’s manifesto, *The theory and practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, which is given to Winston by the secret policeman O’Brien:

The invention of print, however, made it easier to manipulate public opinion, and the film and the radio carried this process further. With the development of television, and the technical advance, which made it possible to receive and transmit simultaneously on the same instrument, private life came to an end. (Orwell 1988, p.163)

Remember, this was published in 1949 when television was not the popular medium it is today, the technology to record and broadcast pictures had only just

been mooted for commercial mass production at that time. Orwell didn't know about *Big Brother*⁹¹ when he wrote about Big Brother.

In Orwell's dystopian vision, the surveillance-state (White 1996) dashes all hope of resistance in people like Winston and Julia. As we learn in the book, those that question too deeply the power of Big Brother are tortured and eventually eliminated:

[Winston] *was walking down the white-tiled corridor, with the feeling of walking in sunlight, and an armed guard at his back. The long-hoped for bullet was entering his brain.* (Orwell 1988, p.236)

These are extreme measures - but they had been used to good effect in Stalinist Russia for more than a decade when Orwell wrote *Nineteen Eighty-four*. Today they only exist in the worst of police states, but they are common enough to be an issue⁹². However, it is Goldstein's class analysis of the social structures existing in the *fictional* year of 1984 that are of real value to the grey collar thesis. In the following passage the class locations of the intellectuals who manage this grim world of permanent war, poverty and oppression are explained:

The new aristocracy was made up for the most part of bureaucrats, scientists, technicians, trade-union organizers, publicity experts, sociologists, teachers, journalists and professional politicians. These people, whose origins lay in the salaried middle class and the upper grades of the working class, had been shaped and brought together by the barren world of monopoly industry and centralized government. (Orwell 1988, p.163)

⁹¹ In 2001 the 'reality' television program *Big Brother* was a worldwide success. The premise was put several young nobodies into a locked house with 24-hour surveillance and then broadcast salacious edited highlights on prime time. It rated through the roof and made millions for its producers, the global production house Southern Star Endemol.

⁹² I'm sure George Orwell would appreciate the irony that most modern police states are (or have been) long-term clients of the United States, alleged 'leader' of the free world. Or is that Big Brother in the White House?

Like many of today's grey collar intellectuals - those with low levels of class-consciousness - they carried the emotional attitudes of a "barren world" and were formed by "monopoly industry and centralized government". This is all too familiar to us today. This is an important concept for the grey collar thesis - as intellectuals newswriters can occupy class locations and hold political opinions that range from the "new aristocracy", to the "salaried middle class" and even to the "upper grades of the working class". In chapter 3, *Hard Yakka*, this is discussed in terms of contradictory class locations (Callinicos 1989b) and class-consciousness. The point that Orwell makes in this passage, about the consciousness and the emotional attitudes of this group being formed by "monopoly industry and the centralized state" is the topic of chapter 4, *The ties that bind*. The important distinction that needs to be made is that in *Nineteen Eighty-four*, dialectics have ceased to exist - there is no real 'hope in the proles' and at the end of the novel Orwell/Winston cannot be anything but fatally pessimistic. However, as I have argued, the emotional dialectic operates to puncture the hegemony at times and reveal what Hallin (1986, 1994) calls the ambivalent attitudes of contemporary grey collar newswriters.

Orwell - a good role model

Orwell is an important role model for the modern grey collar intellectual because he did ultimately believe in the working class. In a famous passage from *Nineteen Eighty-four*, just moments before Winston and Julia are arrested, Winston realises that life is the same for everyone:

It was curious to think that the sky was the same for everybody, in Eurasia, or Eastasia as well as here [Oceania]. And the people under the sky were also very much the same - everywhere all over the world. Hundreds of thousands of millions of people just like this, people ignorant of one another's existence, held apart by walls of hatred and lies, and yet almost exactly the same - people who had never learned to think but who were storing up in their hearts and bellies and muscles the power that would one day overturn the world. If there was hope, it lay in the proles! (Orwell 1988, p.173)

Today there is hope in the proles, precisely because of the operation of the emotional dialectic that manifests itself each day on the front-page of the

newspaper and in news broadcasts on the electronic media. Despite his ultimate pessimism, Winston's vision can inspire us today.

Writing this thesis is my small contribution to the looming struggle Winston evokes in this passage - the class struggle. I believe that grey collar journalists can play a role, if they are able to, as Orwell did, come to terms with the class nature of the society around them and choose an emotional attitude that is on the side of the 'proles'. Orwell is not the only journalist-intellectual to adopt a pro-working class stance in his/her work - some have been acknowledged in other chapters of this thesis.

Ultimately what will determine the class-consciousness of newswriters today is the conflict inherent in the relations of production - the economic and social forces that determine, in the final instance, the emotional attitudes of newswriters.

Grey Collar Journalism: The social relations of news production

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